

‘Nothing will keep me from taking the backway’

**Deconstructing aspirations and desires of male Gambian youth taking the
path of irregular migration**



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Quote on cover by Lamin, a motivated young man, who was deported back to The Gambia after he stranded on his irregular journey to Europe.

Cover photo by the author of Giorgio, her cousin and Nfamarra, a taxi driver on top of Arch 22, a monument in Banjul built to commemorate the 1994 coup d'état of former president Yahya Jammeh

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Abstract

This study investigates young Gambians' migrant aspirations during the political transition from an autocracy to a democracy in 2017. The study considers how migrant aspirations are negotiated through micro and macro socio-cultural environments, as well as through hope in the new government. While the new government and EU sponsored projects aim to limit migrant aspirations for irregular migration towards Europe with an economic 'fix', this study shows this is not likely to succeed, as migrant aspirations are far more complex, more embedded in Gambian society and formed by multiple factors that are not dealt with in the projects.

The research is ethnographic and consists of collected data from youths who intend to-, have intended to- or have tried to irregularly migrate to Europe. Next to that, the study includes data on people in the social networks of irregular migrants. The data on these non-migrants illustrate the general attitude towards irregular migration in the Gambian society and how it is viewed in terms of success and failure. The data show that Gambian youths have mixed motivations for desiring to migrate, which gives an in-depth picture of these desires and how they are shaped by Gambian norms and values. Moreover, the data exemplify that migrant aspirations are contradicting and ever-changing. This research gives a voice to the interviewees' specific views on the world and their life trajectories. Moreover, the study gives attention to the way in which collective imaginaries about Europe and the images on The Gambia influence migrant aspirations. It will be illustrated how these images get reinforced by social networks, the visa policy and by personal life aspirations.

This research shows young Gambians mainly desire to migrate to get an enhanced socio-economic status. They feel useless and aimless, as they fail to provide for their families and they see irregularly migrating as a way to prove themselves and experience progress. Their migrant aspirations are shaped and influenced by social, cultural, political and religious obligations and expectations. This study argues that the formation of their migrant aspirations is a result of an interplay between familial and societal dynamics, such as generational and gender relations, reciprocal social exchange and personal desires of upward social mobility. Therefore possible initiatives for a solution to irregular migration could lay in (women) empowerment and education.

Keywords: Migrant aspirations, Gambian youths, backway, irregular migration, sitting, expectations, upward social mobility, familial obligations, Gambian political transition, European Trust Fund, empowerment

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List of Acronyms

EU: European Union

GWP: Gallup World Poll

IOM: International Organization for Migration

KEYDA: Kombo East Youth Development Alliance

NELM: New Economics of Labour Migration

YepAfrica: Youth Empowerment Proud Africa

YEP: Youth Empowerment Project

AM: Aspiring Migrant

FAM: Formerly Aspiring Migrant

FR: Failed Returnee

Chapter 1: Introduction

'You come to realize in society, when you move with four people or three people and they all left, they all go through the backway and succeeded, so I'm the only one here and the salary in The Gambia are not that good, not satisfying for me, so the best solution I see for myself is going through the backway.' (Abdoul K., 27-04-2017)

This was what Abdoul K., a seemingly impatient young man, told me during our interview in his family home. In common Gambian speech 'taking the backway' means irregularly migrating to Europe. Abdoul is a painter and a friend of my translator and colleague at YepAfrica, S-Bah, who brought me into contact with him. We held a private interview in his room away from his family, as he did not want them to hear that he plans on taking the backway again. With this quote he seemed to say that his desire to take the backway comes from his jealousy of his friends who completed the journey and are now making more money in Europe than he is in The Gambia. This thesis dives into the complexity of such motivations.

In the European media and politics there is an overall opinion that Africans migrating to Europe out of poverty should be deterred. However, they are probably not solely migrating out of poverty, as people often have mixed motivations (Carling 2002). For this research I spent three months in a country where irregular migrants come from, to find out their motivations for migrating to Europe, as I did not completely understand why these people would risk their lives on a dangerous journey to Europe.

Europe is putting a lot of effort in keeping poor migrants out. These migrants are often denied a European visa largely based on their place of birth (Van Houtum, 2016). Next to that, the European Trust Fund of the European Commission is used partially for making deals with African governments to outsource securitization to African countries and implement policies aiming to stop mainly 'economic' migrants coming to Europe (International Cooperation and Development 2018). I was skeptical about this, as the EU is not controlling the manner in which migrants are stopped by the African governments (Knaus 2017). Due to migration management in African countries with structurally imbedded corruption these funds would only stimulate the irregular migrant industry of people-smugglers, the security sector and cause the further erosion of refugee protection (De Haas 2015). For many migrants the Sahara desert is the primary obstacle to overcome and with the funds African governments will control known routes of smugglers through the desert, however, these smugglers will always try and find new (more dangerous) ways, as people's desires to migrate remain unchanged. Consequently, the number of deaths in the Sahara desert is likely to increase without anyone ever finding that out. The European Emergency Trust Fund is, however, not only used to tighten security in the region where migrants are coming from, it is also used to stimulate the job market in the sending area and thereby reduce poverty with the thought that the newly created jobs will keep people from migrating. The EU believes causes of irregular migration lie in economic factors linked to violence and human right abuses. Economic underdevelopment and political instability are therefore seen generally as the main deterrent, or 'root causes', for irregular migration flows (International Cooperation and Development 2018). This thesis questions whether migrant aspirations would change under this EU policy, as the factors influencing these aspirations can include social, economic, political and cultural aspects (Carling 2002).

This study aims to discover which aspects are shaping migrant aspirations of youth in the specific context of The Gambia. The main question the study will try to answer is:

How does the connotation of 'sitting' in The Gambia influence young men living in the West Coast Region during the recent political transition in their aspiration and decision to migrate irregularly to Europe?

'Sitting' refers to a negative feeling of immobility, while pro-active attitudes are more desirable in Gambian society. Next to that, this thesis questions whether the European visa policy is restricting or enabling migrants to migrate irregularly and if the Trust Fund money is used in an effective way to limit irregular migration. What made this country even more interesting to study is the fact that recently, there has been a political transition in the country, from an autocracy to a democracy (Hunt 2017). I was curious about how this transition influences migrant aspirations.

Box 1: Short historic migration overview

The Gambia has a long history of migration to Europe. After its independence from the UK, in the 1970s and the 1980s it was still easy for Gambians to migrate to the West. For travelling to the UK they did not even need a travel visa. However, post-colonial modernization and development failed in The Gambia causing a lot of unemployment (Ceesay 2016). From the mid-1990s the impact of neo-liberal restructuring resulted in many youths only seeing a perspective to self-realization if they migrated towards Europe (Gaibazzi 2010). However, around the same time restrictions on immigration to the West increased and people started to irregularly migrate (Ceesay 2016). During the regime of the former president Yahya Jammeh between 1996-2017, a lot of human right violations were committed, especially by the National Intelligence Agency, a paramilitary group, and also The Gambian Police force. During this time, Gambian migrants were mostly considered political refugees, making it easier to get asylum in Europe. However, this changed with the new democratic regime of Adama Barrow. Now, most Gambian asylum applicants are seen as economic migrants (Hultin et al., 2017). Most Gambians that irregularly migrate to Europe are male youth (Embericos 2016). The Gambia's national youth policy considers youth to be between 15-30 years old (National Youth Policy The Gambia 2009). In 2015 there were 12,205 asylum applications of Gambians across Europe and out of the 6365 Gambian asylum applications in Italy, 63% were outright rejected (Embericos 2016). Many Gambian youths idealize their chances in Europe and seem to be unaware of the limited opportunities for them, as many youths still embark on the journey. Two projects have started in The Gambia sponsored by the EU Emergency Trust Fund, aimed at stabilizing the country and addressing 'root causes' of irregular migration and displaced persons (The European Commission 2017). The two projects together have a budget of 14.9 million euro's. For the first project, that started implementation in the summer of 2017, there is 11 million euro's available and it is aimed at developing the local economy by enhancing employability and self-employment opportunities for youth (International Cooperation and Development 2016). The second project, which started at the end of 2017, got 3.9 million euro's, which is available for strengthening the management and governance of migration and sustainable reintegration of returning migrants in The Gambia (International Organization for Migration 2017).

This study gives a voice to individuals and the factors motivating them to choose irregular migration. In the field, my time was spent amongst the locals, experiencing their customs. Together with colleagues from the organization where I was an intern, YepAfrica, and friends that I lived with, I visited public places, their families and participated in their traditional events and ceremonies. These experiences introduced me to Gambian values and norms. This helped me

understand Gambian youths' expectations and experienced obligations and how their migrant aspirations are influenced by their social networks and the cultural habits of The Gambia.

This thesis refutes the idea of the rational migrant who has access to all information and who makes the decision to migrate alone by assessing possible risks and merits. In contrast, this study shows the perspective of a migrant origin country and the social complexity involved in a person's decision making. This thesis describes migrant decisions through concepts such as desires and aspirations, which can explain how migration is initiated, experienced and represented and which will counter reductive visions of migration (Carling and Collins 2018).

1.1. Research Relevance

The main goal of the research is deconstructing Gambian youths' motivations and aspirations to irregularly migrate in times of the political transition, in order to assess the relevance of the latest policy developments in The Gambia that are focused on limiting irregular migration. This research will not determine an unchanging set of root-causes for irregular migration everywhere, because motivations for irregular migration emerge from a specific historical context and they constantly change along with the changing political and cultural environments, social relationships etc. This research focuses, among others, on how Gambian youths perceive Europe, the responsibilities these young men feel relating to taking the backway and the subjective prestige attached to embarking on the journey.

1.1.1. Scientific Relevance

Irregular migration is a fairly recent phenomenon, as the juridical apparatus that makes the distinction between legal and illegal is less than a century old (Koser 2010) and there is not much country specific research on it yet. Most migration research is focused on theories of the destination countries and it neglects the perspectives of origin countries and the migrants themselves, which are very important in order to understand the phenomenon of migration (Castles 2010, p. 9).

I argue in this study that the motivations for irregular migration in The Gambia are complicated and embedded in society. Therefore, deconstructing migrant aspirations locally will contribute to understanding The Gambian contemporary society. This study aims to get an understanding on how the decision-making is embedded in social-cultural dynamics. This research on migrant aspirations of Gambian youth takes into account the perspectives of people in the migrants' social networks, such as parents, children, and teachers. The opinions of these non-migrants are important to identify the general attitude towards irregular migration (King 2015) and the possible influence of the social network of the aspiring migrant on his decision to take the backway. This thesis creates a multi-vocality regarding irregular migration to Europe and thereby the study gives an image of the culture of migration in The Gambia. It reveals how these people perceive irregular migration in terms of success and failure and how Gambian values and norms influence youth to take the backway. How irregular migration is perceived in Gambian society will also become clear from the interviews I had with social workers and government officials, trying to stop irregular migration. With these different interviewees I have gotten an understanding about how societal collective imaginaries and resource- and power imbalances can pressure young people to embark on the journey. Moreover, the Gambian society has been changing due to the political transition that took place. Research on migrant aspirations of youth who migrated before the transition and came back after and youth who are about to migrate can explain a lot about the changing society and the new

dreams and hopes that accompany the political transition. How Gambian people locally feel about the transition of government and its consequences, influences the amount of people choosing for irregular migration and possibly people returning to The Gambia that already embarked on the journey. This study investigates the agency of the migrant and the enabling or restricting factors in their socio-cultural and political framework. I linked local-level experiences of irregular migration with different socio-spatial levels and global processes. This field is heavily under-theorized and lacks reliable empirical data (Cvajner and Sciortino 2010).

The projects, sponsored by the European Trust Fund, suggest that Gambian migrants are motivated by income maximisation based on comparing relative costs and benefits of staying at home and moving. However, this does not account for people in emigration countries who choose to stay (Thompson 2016). In this thesis I include motivations and aspirations of those people and I argue that the migrant is not a rational decision maker that has access to full information and consequently responds to that (Castles 2010, p.10). The utility-maximizing notion underlying decision-making has hardly been fundamentally challenged (de Haas 2011). This thesis therefore includes a more ethnographic interpretive approach to destabilize this all-encompassing theory. This thesis refutes the idea of the migrant as rational decision maker, as it discusses the different reasons, processes and emotions that result in the decision to irregularly migrate from The Gambia to Europe. This study shows how decisions for irregular migration are not only situated in economic imperatives, but also in imaginative geographies, social relations and obligations, emotional valences and politics and power relations. The thesis builds up a picture of the migrants decision-making from various angles by exploring the culture of migration through the concepts of desires and aspirations. This exposes the social complexity in a person's decision making. These underutilised theoretical perspectives explain an alternative way of framing migration, which critically engages with its own place in politics and mobility (Carling and Collins 2018).

In response to the 2015 refugee crisis, European governments are stressing the need to tackle 'root causes' of migration (Carling and Collins 2018). The economic deterministic view of The Gambian government and the EU on irregular migration causes them to believe that economic development will reduce irregular migration. However, according to the migration transition theories, income growth, improved education and access to information together with improved communication and transport links only increase capabilities to migrate (Castles, De Haas, Miller 2014). Additionally, aspirations also tend to rise with socio-economic development (Carling and Collins 2018). Development is therefore likely to initially increase migration, rather than to reduce it (Smouter 2014), as it helps to provide the resources needed for migration (Castles 2010, p.298). This research will help to understand that the approach to limit irregular migration based on economic determinism by the EU is not necessarily stopping youth from embarking on the unsafe journey. This study gives possible options that can help reduce irregular migration among youths and how they can feel less pressured by their communities to embark on the dangerous journeys. I will explain how factors that do not seem to be related to irregular migration can influence the phenomenon, for instance, (women) empowerment can reduce male migrant aspirations (explained in chapter 4).

1.1.2. Societal Relevance

This study is aimed at getting a deeper understanding of irregular migration from The Gambia to Europe. The resurgence of populism and national anxiety in Europe and the reinvigorated focus on exclusion make it more imperative to explain the motivations and desires of 'the other' regarding

migration (Carling and Collins 2018). From a European perspective economic migrants are a marginalized group within the marginalized group of migrants. Many Europeans perceive economic migrants as a threat, because they fear these migrants are taking their jobs. Images of overcrowded boats crossing dangerous waters suggests people are impelled to move and only the most drastic state actions could alter this. The notion that individualized rational action drives migration choices remains largely unchallenged in the public opinion (Carling and Collins 2018). However, these 'economic' migrants mainly come to Europe to help their families and they often send nearly all the money they make back to their families. In The Gambia, these remittances make up 20% of the national GDP (Jones and Chant 2009). Moreover, many European people are not aware that their political pressure results in more restrictions and a strict European visa policy, which is not necessarily stopping migrants from starting their journeys (chapter 3), but it only leads to more migrants having to make deadly trips to come here. If Europeans become aware of the stories behind these 'economic' migrants, their perception of them might become more nuanced. By discussing the emotions involved with irregular migration, migration is being humanized, which helps with blurring the boundaries between different types of migration and it shows how the subjectivity and identity of migrants is in constant formation rather than predetermined by the place of origin (Carling and Collins 2018). This study will contribute to the stratification of motivations behind 'economic' migration and show that multiple factors in an aspiring migrant's personal socio-cultural environment influence their motivation for irregular migration.

'Economic' migrants are not all independent actors that make the rational choice of income-maximization and therefore migrate from Africa to Europe (Castles 2010). Motivations for migration are not evolving from 'natural' demographic and economic processes, rather they are socially constructed and politically contested (Meyer 2018). The choices for migration are not made in a vacuum, in contrast they are made in the context of the individuals' social relations, emotions and under the influence of political programs (Meyer 2018). However, the projects sponsored by the Trust Fund do look at Gambian migrants in this reductive way. The effectiveness of these projects have not been proven yet. Therefore a research on the implementation and the thoughts of the young people in The Gambia on these plans, is very relevant. The new president Barrow is on the same page as the EU and believes the lack of employment in The Gambia is causing youth to take the backway. He therefore wants to invest in light industries and export products to create employment. According to The Gambian Labour Force Survey (2012) the youth unemployment rate is 38% (International Cooperation and Development 2016). Between 2013 and 2014 the economic growth in the country decreased from 4,3% to 0,9% (Embericos 2016). This study investigates to what extent having a job influences the decision of youth to stay. At the same time, it devotes attention to how the local population receives these projects and if the implementation connects with the structure of Gambian society. This study can inform the projects on who to target to get closer to the desired results.

The aim of the Trust Fund projects is to especially create jobs in agriculture. Farming is at the heart of Quranic education (90% of the population is Muslim), it teaches children about sacrifice, duty to the family and fiscal discipline. The harder the young men/boys work in family farms, the more family members will think that they are fit to conquer difficulties on the backway and the more chances they will have that a family member will financially support the journey (Gaibazzi 2014). The commitment to redistribution and moral rigour that is taught to children are desirable qualities for the migrant, because they will have to be able to endure sacrifices, discrimination, long working hours and immoral temptations in order to send money home. The capacity to provide for the family

is seen as an element of masculinity and failure to meet those expectations contribute to the feeling of less social worth (Gaibazzi 2014). The agrarian ethos is thus exportable to other contexts, like migratory occupations. The more policy makers try to stop illegal migration by focussing on getting young people more involved in sedentary farming, the more they will develop an agrarian ethos that does not presuppose a settled life. This study shows the discrepancy between the Trust Fund sponsored projects and how migrant aspirations are actually formed and how they can change.

Another factor discussed in this study is the image Gambian youth have of Europe. Modern means of communication, like internet and TV, depict Europe as a place of wealth and luxury (Schapendonk and van Moppes 2007, p.9). Nor the EU, nor The Gambian government are deconstructing the geographical imaginary of Europe. This study shows to what extent this image of Europe contributes in young Gambians' decision to migrate irregularly. I hope to prove the EU that it is to their advantage to put systems in work that can make it legal and easier for Gambian youth to visit and work in the EU.

This research goes beyond simple economic explanations of migration and it positions the decision to migration in a social and political everyday life context in order to contribute to more realistic policy initiatives. My outsider's analysis of behavioral patterns in Gambian society and how they influence migrant aspirations can hopefully also inspire Gambians to be more aware of them and therefore more in control.

1.2. Conceptual Framework

This thesis will analyse factors that shape the aspirations of youths and which results in them irregularly migrating. These factors are individual agencies, perceptions, cultural, economic and historical factors, institutional constraints, social group pressures and relationships. The thesis will not develop an all-encompassing theory, but it will explain the complexity, contradictions and unintended consequences of social action concerning irregular migration in The Gambia. This is called developing middle-range theories and it will not provide rules for other types of migration in other times or locations. The results will only be explanatory for the specific context of male youth in the West Coast of The Gambia in the particular historical juncture of the political transition 2016-2017, as migration theory needs to be historically and culturally sited, and relate to structure and action (Castles 2010, p.87).

To discover and explain the migration aspirations for irregular migration of Gambian youth I will begin in chapter two by analyzing the socio-cultural influences on migrant aspirations at a micro-level. In the third chapter I will look at imaginaries of Europe versus images of The Gambia, which discusses macro-level influences of the emigration environment on aspirations. I will discuss the local view on the visa policy. I will explain how restrictions that keep someone from moving might fuel the desire to go, while no restrictions to move might decrease these aspirations (de Haas 2015). In the fourth chapter I will look at how (new) policies influence migrant aspirations. State and European policies and social networks have a structuring effect on migration, while they facilitate some to migrate, they hinder others. Environmental determinism is avoided by including the voices of youths who first intended to migrate irregularly, but decided to stay. Below I will explain returning concepts throughout the thesis that currently shape young Gambians' desires to migrate irregularly.

1.2.1. Gambian (migrant) aspirations

This study tries to discover to what extent Gambian youths' migrant aspirations are motivated by the structure of the society and the culture of migration in Gambian society. It will show how migrant aspirations are embedded in social and cultural processes in The Gambia and in the historically embedded geographical imaginary about Europe. It discusses how migrant aspirations can emerge when particular individual characteristics interact with a macro-level emigration environment, encompassing the Gambian social, economic and political context (Carling and Schewel 2018). Accordingly, it is explained how the political transition can influence the subjective perceptions about geographical opportunities (de Haas 2016).

Aspirations could be translated as wishes to achieve something, like a career or starting a family. The difference is that aspirations refer to an intersection of personal, collective and normative dimensions (Carling and Collins 2018). According to Leavy and Smith (2010) aspirations are formed in early childhood and shaped and modified over time by experience and environment. Aspirations thus entail a transformative potential that is institutionally embedded. They are socially situated, but also future-oriented (Carling and Schewel 2018). Aspirations relate next to the future or potential, also to the present, as they represent and influence people's orientations, values and actions in the present (Zimbardo and Boyd 2008).

Migrant aspirations are a manifestation of thoughts and feelings about potential mobility (Carling 2002). They depend on the general life expectations of youths and their perceptions about, if these aspirations can be better fulfilled at home or in Europe. These aspirations and perceptions about geographical opportunities are very subjective. However, they are based on locally existing ideas and meanings attached to different places. The aspiring migrant's personal interest in migration thus exists within a particular social context (Ray 2006, 209).

In first instance, migration emerged as a trend in response to poverty. Accordingly, success stories of migrants and the development of migrant communities encouraged further migration through social networks (Thompson 2016). Then a culture of migration develops itself and education, beliefs, myths, symbols, celebration of migration in various media and material goods instigate migrant aspirations. The learned social behaviour becomes 'desiring migration' (Thompson 2017). The culture of migration inspires migrant aspirations even if it appears as if there are few tangible economic and social motivations for migration. Migration then has become a rite of passage or a source of social capital (Bal 2013). Migration aspirations are mainly influenced by social norms and expectations about migrating or staying, but also by the opportunities there are for migrating (Carling and Collins 2018). The decision to migrate might feel easier in the context of The Gambia than for example in The Netherlands, because a Gambian can follow a 'near-obligatory' social blueprint to migrate irregularly (De Haas 2014).

Decision-making for migration does not happen in a singular moment, but migratory processes are on-going (Carling and Schewel 2018). Migrant aspirations can decrease and increase under influence of perceived opportunities and constraints. These opportunities and constraints can be shaped by attitudes and actions of the people in society. In Gambian society sharing is considered one of the highest virtues. When you are financially able to share, social prestige will soon follow. This results in individual aspirations getting easily entangled with the concerns of family, friends and community, which may translate into migrant aspirations. Therefore it is crucial to understand the context-specific dynamics.

1.2.2. Social becoming: desires and feelings of social worth

While aspiration refers to plans, strategies and goals, desire connects more to the affective and material drive behind migration that relates to becoming (Carling and Collins 2018). Social worth is connected to personhood. Youths with feelings of low social worth desire upward social mobility. How others perceive and define someone can largely influence one's desires concerning social mobility. Depending on the society, upward social mobility can be connected to becoming a man.

Feminist scholars already emphasized that identities are constructed and that the subjectivities in migration are continuously undergoing transition. Migrant aspirations are continuously negotiated under influence of social norms, gendered roles of obligations and expectations (Carling and Schewel 2018). All drivers of migration are evolving out of subjectivities of migrants. Even the economic drives are socially constructed, as this economic interest in migration only exists in particular social contexts. To explore how migration is being normalized in society it is useful to illuminate the adolescents' relation towards migration and their perception on how they see their identities as belonging or being constrained in particular places (Meyer 2018).

In many West-African communities leaving is considered as moving forward and migration has taken a key role in the transition to adulthood or manhood (Mondain and Diagne 2013). From the 1980s on the migrant became a role model for others in origin countries, which instigated migration desires. This caused a sense of lack in the national and local life, compared to the endless possibilities foreignness seemed to offer (Carling and Collins 2018). Migrant desires refer to wanting to become otherwise, being drawn into another world, because you believe that the possibilities to accomplish this are there. Desires to migrate result from: family situations and orientations, how someone is exposed to imaginings of other places and the mobility of other people from the community (Collins 2018). The migrant expresses future possibilities that are desired, as well as the social structures they emerge in. The decision to migrate is thus not based on rational decision-making, but it is negotiated decision between the future, past and present (Collins 2018). Therefore, it is important to investigate the emotional dimension in migration, the migrant's circulation of feelings within and across borders (Carling and Collins 2018), as there could be a empirical disjuncture between expectations and desires concerning migration and the actual experiences of the migrant. Their relationship to their home place often represents ambivalent feelings (Meyer 2018).

1.2.3. Involuntary Immobility

Before the former president Jammeh came to power in The Gambia, immigration policies were less restrictive as they are now and being immobile was more of a voluntary choice, without any shame in it. However, The Gambia knows a long history of emigration and sedentary life was not necessarily a natural state of being. Currently many people that would have migrated before, but are now not able to do so, feel stuck in a role that is not of one's making and choice. These immobile youths often perceive themselves as worthless and unable to experience progress (Jonsson 2012). Immobility derives from an inability to fulfil migrant aspirations, however it could also result from a preference to stay. This 'voluntary immobility' is often not taken into account in research concerning immobility (Carling and Schewel 2018). The notion 'involuntary immobility' describes the situation of young people who desire to migrate to Europe to fulfil their aspirations, however they are not able to do this, because of constraints such as overwhelming travel costs and restrictive immigration policies (Carling 2002). The Gallup World Poll (GWP) estimated that in 2010, 14 % of the world's adult

population aspired to migrate, while about 4 % of the world's population actually migrated (Carling and Schewel 2018). These numbers suggest that there are many people that are involuntary immobile. The amount of people that are involuntary immobile might even be larger, because the GWP restricted the question to moving 'permanently', while a lot of people, especially youths initially intend to return, therefore the results exclude aspirations for circular migration.

With the contemporary urge of controlling and restricting migration, the aspiration to migrate has grown and the ability to migrate has declined. This is connected to the 'nerves syndrome', a condition experienced mostly by men that are in a state of involuntary immobility. They are making themselves suffer by sitting and talking about their aspirations to travel to Europe. They feel pressured by their families to provide for them, resulting in stress, which can become a paralyzing factor if they do not have the ability to travel. They can get frustrated and withdrawn from society, because the society does not see them as adults. As this self-torturing happens when sitting, many Gambians refer to this condition as 'sitting'. In the cultural context of The Gambia 'sitting' means e.g. being immobile, aimless, useless and it almost means being broke (Gaibazzi 2015).

When seeing aspiration as the feeling of being able to act on your decisions, in relation to ability as structural constraints, it is forgotten that they mutually inform and define each other. The notion of ability does not take into account the socially constructed feeling someone has of his/her ability to leave. It would be more useful to replace ability with capability, as this notion refers to both structural constraints that keeps someone put (desirably/or undesirably), as well as structural constraints that inspires someone to desire to migrate (Carling and Schewel 2018). The structural constraint of the visa policy is not a destruction of the force of desire, that enables action, however it only redirects its movement towards for instance irregular migration (Collins 2018).

1.2.4. Social networks influencing migrant aspirations

Next to restrictive immigration policies, structural constraints shaping migrant aspirations can be education opportunities, social networks, economic resources and parental attitude (Meyer 2018). The social network theory explains the creation and maintenance of social ties migrants have with others (Castles et al. 2014). Being part of the social networks can provide someone social capital, but it also produces social control, which people might want to escape. Social networks shape aspirations and imaginations and they can also drive decisions to move. Having a contact abroad can inspire someone to migrate as well (Palloni et al. 2001). Within the social networks of Gambian migrants especially families indirectly largely influence migrants' desires and aspirations. This influence results from the Gambian family hierarchy, -composition and -division of gendered roles. Gambian families live together in compounds, which are fenced or walled settlements. There can be more than thirty people living in one compound, but in the rural areas the average lays around fifteen people in one compound (Kea 2013). A Muslim man in The Gambia can have up to four wives if he can financially take care of them. However, I have heard several sounds of young men that did not aspire marrying more than one wife, as it only gives 'problems' and causes jealousy between wives and the children coming from different marriages. The compound usually has a main house for the senior male and one or several smaller houses. Each wife lives in one of the separate houses or rooms with her children. Within families there is a clear gendered separation. Young men are supposed to support their fathers and other older male members of the compound, while girls are supporting their mothers and older female members of the compound. Senior wives and mothers-in-law can command the labour of junior wives and girls in the compound and they take the decisions regarding other forms of labour contributions. The level of authority between the wives does not only depend

on their marital position, but also on their ability to produce children (Kea 2013). Men and women traditionally eat separately. This gendered separation also applies to the division of labour and of daily routines (Kea 2013).

The targeting group for this research will be youth. The concept of youth is a socio-cultural construction based on biological attributes and time and culture bound characteristics (Durham, 2004). Being considered 'youth' depends on people's social categorisation that is related to context-specific norms and customs. Youth is a transitory phase from child to adulthood. In The Gambia this phase is desirably as short as possible, in contrast to the Western view (Alber, Van der Geest and Reynolds-Whyte, 2008). By listening to and carrying out (domestic) tasks Gambian children can demonstrate strength of character and their ability to provide for their families and the community (Kea 2013). In The Gambia youth can be considered between adolescence up to somewhere in their thirties. The social system of The Gambia is 'gerontocratic', according to Touray (2006). This means that elders mostly lead the community. To become an elder you have to possess certain values, determined by the norms of Gambian society, like being eloquent, wealthy or brave. To be considered an adult in The Gambia depends on e.g. rites of passages completed, the social responsibility that someone takes on and social status (Waldie 2006). Markers of adulthood can be e.g. marriage, income, travelling and the experience of suffering. These societal pressures conform young men to masculine expectations and obligations, which can lead to migrant aspirations.

A declining economy after the 1980s resulted in many male family heads being unable to fulfil their obligations as sole subsistence providers (Ceasay 2016). Economic crises also put young people in a precarious situation, because of unemployment the attributes of adulthood become more unattainable, which results in waiting longer to be accepted as adults and therefore migrating can be seen as the only way to becoming a man.

The decision to irregularly migrate for a young man can also be directly made by the family. When the family functions as a social security system, sending a family member abroad is a strategy to minimize income risks. The family strategy for risk diversification is a theory of the 'New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM)' (Castles 2010, 11). This theory emphasises rational economic decision making of the family unit and neglects the non-economic (locally embedded) factors that shape the decision for migration. This theory under lays cumulative causation of migration, arguing that each decision made by families for migration alters the social context in which migration decisions are made, in such a way that additional movement becomes more likely (Thompson 2017).

The migrant's decision or the family's decision for someone to migrate to Europe can also be influenced by relative deprivation. Relative deprivation can emerge when one family is receiving remittances, while another family is not and therefore out of jealousy they will pressure one of their sons to migrate (Castles and Miller 2009). The family can also acquire a higher socio-economic status in the community if they have a family member in Europe. Families raise their children with a feeling that they are supposed to contribute to them as soon as they can. Every individual has his/her own threshold of stress. Migration can also be seen by young people as a way to escape the social control and oppression within families.

When analyzing irregular migration through migrant networks, migrant systems theories and household influence, it is explained as a pro-active deliberate decision. This helps with the understanding of the migrants' agency in creating meso-level, socio-economic and cultural structures that make irregular migration processes self-sustaining. It is, however, important not to forget the ways in which the state influences decisions for irregular migration, because this can explain more about the stagnation and weakening of migration systems over time (Castles, De Haas, Miller 2014).

1.2.5. Imaginaries

Studies researching cultures of migration primarily focus on why people desire to migrate and give less attention to the decision on where they desire to migrate to. The concept geographical imaginations refers to mental images of different places, their culture, their economy, their politics, their social and physical environment and the people living there (Thompson 2016). Migration is mostly related to aspiring a 'better life' somewhere else. This imaginary of a better life can be influenced by group pressures, role models and also socio-economic circumstances. The desire to be somewhere else is rooted in socio-cultural imaginaries that are not necessarily a reflection of reality (O'Reilly 2014). These imagination are often relational, the unknown places are imaginatively being connected and compared to known places. The geographical imaginations are often over-simplifications, however they are important in making a place understandable and accessible (Thompson 2016). Imaginaries are culturally shared and socially transmitted collective images of different actors, not just migrants. The imaginaries interact with the aspiring migrant's personal images and they shape and give meaning to places (Salazar 2011). Popular media can (mis)represent a better life somewhere else and these images circulate in an unequal global space. These images get filtered through the migrants' personal aspirations, which means aspiring migrants adjust these images to their own life aspirations and simultaneously they also adjust their desires to the images (Salazar 2011). Imaginaries shape aspirations, but imaginaries also get shaped through personal and collective aspirations. Imaginaries can become social structures that shape, constrain and enable actions, because how people understand/perceive the world influences how they experience and react to it (Thompson 2016). Imaginations of culture, imaginations of places and imaginations of social, political and economic possibilities all influence the aspirations and desire for migration (Thompson 2016). This thesis investigates migration decision-making within a geographical imaginations approach. It tries to understand youth's perceptions of both home and away, and it is able to account for non-migration. This study tries to show the lack of correspondence in Gambian society between projected ideals and aspirations versus perceived and experienced reality of (aspiring) migrants.

1.3. Research Questions

The wish for upward social-mobility is the main drive behind migrant aspirations. This wish results from familial pressures and a lack of personal social worth (explained in chapter 2) and it is also instigated by imaginaries of Europe and images of The Gambia (explained in chapter 3). The recent political transition and the changes that come with it can influence whether this wish is translated into migrant aspirations or not (explained in chapter 4). As pro-active attitudes are a pre-condition to socio-economic success and because the youths that I interviewed repeatedly mentioned the word 'sitting' in relation to their migrant aspirations, the main question that will be answered in the conclusion is: **How does the connotation of 'sitting' in The Gambia influence young men living in the West Coast Region during the recent political transition in their aspiration and decision to migrate irregularly to Europe?**

The answer to the main question will derive from the answers to the three sub questions, which will be discussed consequently throughout the following chapters.

My sub questions are:

1. What are the main aspects in Gambian society that create the local-level migration environment and how do they shape the migrant aspirations of Gambian youth?

In this chapter I explain how the life aspirations of Gambian youth can translate into migrant aspirations. Local migrant encouraging factors can be the migrant's family, friends and their communities. Moreover, this chapter discusses collective decision-making of the family in relation to irregular migration, norms and values stimulating irregular migration and relative deprivation leading to irregular migration. This chapter exposes the structure of Gambian society, their discourses and how it influences the decision of many youths to migrate. Next to that, I look at how the notion of social worth is connected to the decision to irregularly migrate and how it is seen as a way for the migrants to prove themselves. This chapter shows how migrant aspirations relate to non-rationalities such as chance, luck and believe. It analyses how faith can be a migrant encouraging factor.

2. Which images does Gambian youth have about the geographical environments of Europe and The Gambia and how do these perceptions influence migrant aspirations?

This chapter explains how Gambian youths' life aspirations and thereby migrant aspirations can be adjusted by comparing The Gambia with Europe. It analyses how the imaginaries of Europe became embedded in Gambian society and why they are migrant encouraging factors. Moreover, the chapter explains how societal images on the visa policy influence migrant aspirations for the backway. Next to that, it shows how European imaginaries are kept intact for the community even if Gambian migrants have been confronted with reality. Besides, it explains how the images of The Gambia influence youths' self-esteem and thereby can motivate their decision to irregularly migrate.

3. How do current policy measures influence the decision to migrate, and to what extent is local empowerment a suitable policy solution?

This chapter analyses the effect of the political transition on the migrant aspirations. It shows what kind of effect the new president has on youths' hopes and dreams for a future in The Gambia. The chapter discusses the hope Gambians have in a democracy and if job creation can influence migrants to come back to The Gambia.

The eleven million project sponsored by the EU Trust Fund is called the Youth Empowerment Project The Gambia. This chapter discusses the design and implementation of this project and to what extent it is an 'empowerment' project. Accordingly, it questions what effect local empowerment has on migrant aspirations.

Especially in the chapters that answer the latter two sub questions there is much attention for how imaginative factors can shape youths' migrant aspirations.

1.4. Methodology

I went into the research field with the intention to explore youths' meanings, emotions, values and intentions relating to irregular migration. My research is based on qualitative methods, as I believe that human behavior is 'subjective, complex, messy, irrational and contradictory' (Clifford, Cope, Gillespie and French, 2016, p.6).

1.4.1. Framing the subject and choosing a research approach

I went to The Gambia, because this was the focus of a research project managed by Dr. Lotje de Vries, assistant professor at the Wageningen University. The project was focused on the effects of the political transition on the society in The Gambia. I indicated that I was interested in how dreams and goals of young people were being influenced by this political transition and De Vries helped me to get in touch with the youth organization YepAfrica. YepAfrica helps local youth with empowerment and entrepreneurship. YepAfrica is situated in Brikama. The employees of YepAfrica visit villages to inform young people and their parents on the dangers of irregular migration, which means they are in contact with youths who are involved in irregular migration one way or another. My focus of interest is irregular migration and the involvement of the EU in African countries trying to limit this phenomenon, which made The Gambia an ideal place to do research, because at that time a project funded by the European Trust Fund just started there, which focused on developing the country to limit irregular migration. I departed on the 27th of March 2017 and stayed until the 24th of June 2017. I stayed in a lodge in a quiet neighborhood in Brikama, not far from where the learning center of the organization YepAfrica is situated. Brikama is the second biggest city in The Gambia and has 93.000 inhabitants. It is situated in the West Coast Region. The city hardly houses international tourism, because the touristic area is situated one hour away around the Senegambia strip north-west of Brikama and closer to the biggest city called, Serrekunda. Serreh, one of my colleagues, lives together with her family in the neighborhood of the lodge where I stayed. During my stay I was always welcome to have supper with them, just like I was always welcome to eat with Kaddy, who lives with her children on the same compound as the lodge where I stayed. In the evenings I would often hang out with the gardener/manager of the lodge, named Beres, a guy in his beginning thirties. He introduced me to all his friends, young men, who live in the neighborhood and together we often drank ataja (Chinese green tea) and chatted about life. I wanted to understand the social world of 'the other'. I believe meanings are situated and constructed through history and cultural framings. Therefore, the social world can best be studied from within the context of 'the other'. I tried to submerge myself in The Gambian lifestyle and was open to visit the local Marabout, attend and participate in various traditional events like Ramadan, Iftar (the breaking of the fast), naming ceremony etc. With this ethnographic approach I could better understand social norms, meanings and emotions and the complex relationships and processes involved in the decision making to irregularly migrate (Korf, 2006, p. 469).

1.4.2. Conducting interviews and understanding the information

My colleagues at YepAfrica with their broad network gave me access to youths coming from different backgrounds that intend to-, have intended to- or have tried to irregularly migrate to Europe. Next to that, they also helped me with getting in contact with government officials, school children, teachers, social workers and parents with children who have migrated irregularly. My colleague, translator and friend S-Bah would make most of the appointments and in most cases the interviewees came to the learning centre in Brikama for the interviews. However, some of the interviewees I met in a public place or in their own houses, especially the elderly people. Most of the interviewees knew S-Bah, who attended almost all the interviews. This made the interviewees more comfortable speaking to me and made them trust me more to tell their motivations and their experiences regarding irregular migration. Most of the time, before the interviews I got my interviewees a soft drink, which would give them the feeling that we would have an informal conversation. I began my interviews with

telling them my research objective and that I was a student doing research on irregular migration. I asked them if I could record the interview, which was no problem except with some of the government officials, then I would just take notes. I also explained that the recordings would only be used for the purposes of my thesis.

I interviewed Gambian youths who are about to migrate about their motivations and life experiences. Observing and asking about how migratory adventures are prepared and discussed gave me a picture of the complex nature of thresholds involved in the migratory processes. Because I think the drive to migrate is largely based on imaginaries, I asked the youths about their hopes and dreams for the future and how they have changed over the last couple of years. When I interviewed youths who tried the backway but failed to complete it, I tried to find out how willing they were to try irregular migration again and if they would influence others to go or not. While interviewing youths who have had the intention to take the backway, but changed their minds, I aimed at getting to know why they made this decision and what might be possible effective ways to limit irregular migration. To comprehend the social environment where these (potential) migrants came from, I interviewed influential stakeholders. I interviewed parents of migrated youth to discover what influence they had on the decision of youth to migrate irregularly. I had conversations with children of primary and secondary school to discover what the ideas are about irregular migration at a young age and what they learn about it from their surroundings. I also interviewed a teacher and the head of a school to find out how they experience the way schoolchildren deal with irregular migration. I talked with a Gambian scholar and with government officials who deal with irregular migration to comprehend the academic and the governmental opinion about this issue and how they influence the society with their reasoning. I also interviewed social workers of nongovernmental organizations who are trying to limit irregular migration, about what they think about the reasons for young people to migrate irregularly and what the best ways are to help them. Lastly, I interviewed the program development advisor of the EU Trust Fund project to limit migration to understand what his view is on irregular migration and how it can be limited. All these interviews together can offer a critical framework through which Gambian youths can see their country and Europe. With this research I have got a better understanding on the social phenomena relating to irregular migration in The Gambia and the societal processes that stimulate it.

My research is based on qualitative methods, as working with quantitative data would oversimplify the study towards complex and diverse patterns of behaviour (Clifford, Cope, Gillespie and French, 2016). I interviewed people in different life-trajectories, all connected to irregular migration to get several perspectives on the phenomenon. To obtain a profound understanding of the motivations for irregular migration I had a lot of informal conversations on that topic, in-depth semi-structured interviews (19x) and I also did some focus-group interviews (8x). In the interviews of both types I observed the behavior of the participants. In the focus-group there was room for discussion on topics between the participants, which gave me more space for the participant observations. Participant observation is useful to identify cultural and social patterns and helps with the analyzing of local processes, practices, norms, values and reasoning embedded in social and cultural livelihoods (Clifford et al., 2016). Participant observation gave me a different perspective on the understanding of the perceptions and motivations, because it can show the difference between what people think and what they say. Using these three methods is called triangulation, which gives more credibility to my research, because multiple sources can provide similar findings (Baxter & Eyles, 1997). Most of my interview questions were open-ended, however before the interview I tried to create an open atmosphere, by asking simple closed questions like name, age, education level and profession.

Because I never gave a judgment to the answers I was able to get their sincere perception on issues we discussed. The semi-structured interviews gave the interviewees more space to express their opinions and emotions beyond the answers I would get from a questionnaire. Through involving myself in The Gambia lifestyle, experiencing daily activities like going to shops, the market, taking the local taxis, eating lunch and dinner with Gambians, I was better able to interpret the answers given to my interview questions. In daily life I discovered that many Gambians value a lot what others think of them, therefore they often brag. For example, my friend Beres explained why some of my acquaintances wanted to hang out with me and show me off at social events, even though they knew I was in a relationship, as they believe the community will think they have made it in life when they are associated with a white woman, because white people are associated with money. This urge for upward social-mobility also put many motivations for taking the backway into context. Another example influencing migrant aspirations had to do with trucks I saw in daily life that were being filled with boys around the age of twelve. They were about to get their circumcision ceremony. They would be taken into the bush for a specific period where they had to prove themselves as men and where elderly men would teach them about respect and Gambian traditions. This puts the urge the men talked about throughout the interviews, to prove themselves as men by wanting to overcome the hardship of the backway, into context. In daily life I also experienced superstition being very much embedded in Gambian society. Educated people talked to me about stories they heard of people selling their child to the devil in the bush and my associates were warning me to stop visiting Marabouts, as they could curse me. This believe in the supernatural could also influence motivations and decision making in the choice to irregularly migrate (as explained further in chapter 2).

1.4.3. Data documentation and Analysis

After returning from the fieldwork I coded text elements of the interviews in the online software Atlas.ti. In the first phase of coding I did not use much conceptual codes, but I stayed close to the material, which is called 'open-coding' (Creswell 2007). Afterwards I simplified the codes and merged some codes together. Then I divided the codes under the three sub questions of my research. The sub questions consist of more than one element. These elements became themes, under which I further divided the codes. At the same time I linked codes that related to each other together. This way of data documentation made it easier to get an overview of the information that I gathered to begin my analysis. Throughout the thesis I explain why I relate pieces of information together and why I draw certain conclusions. I used an auto-ethnographic style, throughout the thesis I place myself within the social context, which displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the the surroundings (Creswell 2007).

1.4.4. Awareness of limitations

As an outsider to the Gambian society I analysed Gambian identities, their culture, their perception on places and their experience of their social relations. The research field is shaped by my, the researcher's, professional and social circumstances. I am a product of the West, with all the privileges which come with it, therefore my view is different than that of a native Gambian. This required a high degree of reflection of my own positioning and involvement as a researcher when I analysed the data, which is called 'critical introspection' (Amit 2000, p. 13). My appearance as a white woman could have influenced the way and the amount of information my interviewees shared with me. During the interviews it sometimes felt as if my interviewees saw me as someone that could not

understand where they came from, because they believed I came from such a different environment. This could have led to them withholding information, as they would think I would not understand it. Sometimes they expressed that I did not go through the same struggles as they had gone through, that I did not even have to apply for a visa to come to The Gambia, that I did not know how it is to be poor. These comments derived from their perception of me as European woman, coming from a place where they believe everyone has social security and everyone has similar opportunities in life when it comes to education, healthcare, job security, travelling opportunities etc.

My interviewees were aware that the EU and also their government to a certain extent stigmatize irregular migration to Europe, therefore, when I asked the potential migrants about this topic, they might not have felt completely safe to tell me everything about their plans. I tried to convince them of my impartiality by emphasizing me being a student.

I asked the participants about their perceptions on irregular migration related issues at a specific moment in time, however perceptions change over time, therefore the data are less reliable. Sometimes perceptions on their migrant aspirations even changed within the limited time of the interview depending on whether we were discussing positive or negative consequences of irregularly migrating at that moment. There are also some limits to my research methodology, as I was not able to compare my qualitative research with quantitative data (on how many people irregularly migrate), because this information is not available. However, these limitations have not withheld me from answering my research questions and achieving the objectives of the study.

Chapter 2: Developing migrant aspirations to gain social worth and deal with family pressures

This chapter discusses the life aspirations of Gambian youth, which can be pursued, according to these youth, through irregular migration (De Haas 2011). The question I will try to answer with this chapter is: What are the main aspects in Gambian society that create the local-level migration environment and how do they shape the migrant aspirations of Gambian youth?

The backway is an instrument to fulfil one's desires. One of the biggest desires of Gambian youth is attaining upward social mobility. The possession and display of wealth and consumer goods are nowadays important determinants of acquiring an enhanced social status in Gambian society. While previously, markers of social success were level of education or being a member of a particular family lineage (Ceesay 2016), nowadays, in this time of globalisation, modern means of communication made it possible to compare images of The Gambia and Europe easily. In the eyes of many Gambians the framed Europe seems like a wealthy paradise, which makes Gambian society more vulnerable to feelings of relative deprivation and jealousy of people that reached Europe. Consequently, in fear of being seen by the community as aimless failures that do nothing and because many youngsters do not have the ability to travel regularly, they take the backway.

In this chapter I will firstly explain where this fear comes from and I will clarify why these youths see irregular migration as the way to gain consideration and to be seen as respected grown-ups in society. Then I will shortly discuss how traumas of failed returnees affect their personal social worth. Secondly, I will explain how the migrants' aspirations are shaped by implicit and explicit expectations from the family and kinship networks in order to show the extent to which the choice to migrate irregularly is socially embedded. Lastly, in order to show the supernatural elements shaping migrant aspirations, I will give some attention to how believe in luck and faith in Gambian society influences youth to actually take the backway.

Legend to symbols

To differentiate the various types of youths and their migration aspirations I distinguish:

AM: Aspiring Migrant

FAM: Formerly Aspiring Migrant. The youths in this category used to have the intention to migrate irregularly, however they got 'empowered' to stay. Nevertheless, some of them seemed to have the wish to migrate (irregularly).

FR: Failed Returnee. The youths in this category never successfully completed their backway journey, i.e. they were deported or returned voluntarily from Africa or Europe.

2.1 Personal social worth

Through the interviews it became clear that many youths who take the backway seem to have a lack of personal social worth. Several young men explained that they feel useless when depending on others for their survival. Instead, they wish to financially contribute to their families and communities. These un-empowered youths are easily influenced by their friends and other societal pressures to conform to certain norms. The desperate looking Causu (**AM**), father of two children,

also seemed very much concerned about what others think of him and keen on earning respect from his family and the community. He stated:

'my friends, they all leave now. If I met (meet) with people, they think I am scared of going to backway, they will give me less respect, they see me as a useless person, like I don't have aim, while I have aim. If people meet me here and I went to Europe, they give me respect, I did not even go to Dakar in fact'. (Causu, 19-04-2017)

This last part emphasizes his feeling of uselessness, because Dakar (which is the closest capital city besides the capital of The Gambia) is usually the first place Gambians visit to gain some travel experience. Causu does not want people to think he is scared of the dangers of the backway. He wants to prove himself as a man.

Besides taking the backway to prove being a fearless and a 'responsible' adult, irregular migration is additionally seen as a way to re-enter linear processes of progress through time, in other words, to develop yourself. Johnson (2012) describes in his research how Malian youths experience migration as the passage to adulthood and how immobile youths fail to experience progress as their communities look down on them for their lack of commitment (p. 115). This also happens in Gambian communities and it stimulates insecure young people to migrate irregularly, especially when their friends already succeeded in taking the backway. This is also the reason why the impatient Abdoul K. (FR) embarked on the journey. He said:

'If they (his friends, who succeeded in taking the backway) come back, they live in luxury, while you are still the same, so you really feel it is difficult to live (in The Gambia).' (Abdoul K., 27-04-2017)

Abdoul assumes that succeeding in the backway will lead to an abundance of wealth and he does not want to miss out on that. He had been deported out of Tenerife in 2013, but he made clear that he still desires to try the backway again, as soon as he sees a possibility. It seemed that he feels stuck living back with his family in The Gambia, while his friends are in Europe. Below, I will further explain how the backway is associated with the experience of progress. Furthermore, I will go into detail on how taking the backway can actually change behavioural patterns. But first, I will elaborate more on how irregular migration is seen as a passage to adulthood and a masculine duty.

2.1.1. Becoming a man

According to Touray (2006) the social system of The Gambia is patriarchal. The social position in society is largely determined by gender. Men are mostly considered to be the head of families and usually largely provide for the financial and material support, while women take care of the daily chores and duties of the household (Touray 2006). The ambitious Causu D. (FR) explained the gender based division of roles as follows:

'Here (in The Gambia) you spend a lot of time working and you earn less and not all female can do that. Most of the time it is the job of the men to do this, working a long period of time and then sharing the earnings with the whole family.' (Causu D., 18-06-2017)

He believes it is the responsibility of men to take care of the family financially. His family spent his whole salary before, to the extent that he could not save anything for himself, therefore in order to

satisfy them and himself he took the backway, as he believes that in Europe *'everything is there..., money is there and civilization and I like football.'* Causu D. also believes that in Europe his dream to become a professional soccer player can become reality.

The desperate-looking Causu (AM) is frustrated that he is not able to provide for his family at all and he believes that taking the backway will open up opportunities for him to change this. He explained:

'as a grown man you cannot just sit at home with no work, no source of income. As a result of this frustration they (we) take the backway.' (Causu, 19-04-2017)

The capacity to provide for the family is seen as an element of masculinity and failure to meet those expectations contribute to a low self-esteem (Gaibazzi 2014). It makes young men vulnerable to societal pressures to migrate or to marry, because they want to conform to the masculine expectations and obligations. My translator said about the depressed-looking Salifo (FR):

'I think he was also one of the people that was trying getting forced into marriage, that he really don't like, just like me, without earning much just pushing you to get married, he said without good money, salaries, good pay, good job, he is not getting into that kind of things, so it is better for him to leave this country.' (Salifo, 18-06-2017)

Salifo took the backway, because he thought that if he would succeed, his parents would be proud of him. Unfortunately, he was deported back to The Gambia and his interaction with people changed after the suffering he had been through, according to my translator who knew him since childhood.

According to Beres, my friend at the place where I stayed, who is involuntary immobile but does not want to risk his life by taking the backway, three quarters of Gambian families pressure their children to get married if they are above 27 years old. Additionally he explained:

"Others tell me: 'your younger brother get married, so you also have to get married' (after which he laughed insincerely)." (Beres, 20-04-2017)

Beres explained that it is very difficult to find a wife if you are poor. Traditionally, if you want to marry a girl, you are expected to woo the family with your good reputation and by buying them expensive presents. Building up a good reputation within the community is for instance achievable through migrating irregularly, according to farmers Modou (FAM) and Ismael (FAM). They explained that taking the backway would make someone a qualified husband, because a migrant is able to endure the hardship of the journey, which means that this person is a 'real' man that can take care of a wife. My translator explained to me that if you finally manage to marry, you have to take good financial care of your wife, otherwise she will probably divorce you, which is even more damaging to your societal position than not being able to marry her in the first place.

Besides marriage and financially providing for the family, other societal measurements for success are 'travelling' and 'overcoming hardship' (Gaibazzi 2010). These accomplishments are combined in taking the backway. A big part of Gambian society associates 'staying at home' with failure, while 'travelling' is associated with maturing and making progress (Gaibazzi 2010). By taking the backway, the seemingly responsible Lamin (FR) hoped to prove himself to the community as a grown-up, as he said:

'because I am a man, I have to face suffer for my country to have development. I alone to feel pain is what I want.' (Lamin, 05-05-2017)

The Gambian society considers taking the backway as a heroic action, because the migrant is risking his own life trying to improve the lives of other Gambians. It seems as if Lamin took the backway to prove his masculinity. He explained that he already felt responsible to take care of his family at a young age, because his father died early. This forced him to drop out of school and he felt that through migrating irregularly, he still had a chance to learn something to pass on to his future children.

Modou (FAM) had the intention to take the backway when he was around fifteen, as his parents could not pay for his education anymore, however he found a sponsor around that time, which made him stay put. Nevertheless, currently his aspirations for the backway seem to come back, as he explained his perception that immobility is a threat to masculinity (Gaibazzi 2010), as follows:

'If you use the backway, you are the man. They (the community) respect you more. Me, I have to be in Europe.' (Modou, 19-04-2017)

The flighty Buba (FAM) hopes that the political transition brings more employment opportunities and that it would become easier to attain a travel visa, although enduring the hardship of the backway, would gain him more respect from the community in his perception. Likewise, he gives *'maximum respect'* to his friends that embarked on the journey.

Just like the other Formerly Aspiring Migrants, Omar (FAM) was brought up with the idea that *'if you don't travel, it means you are unsuccessful in life'*. However, within the Formerly Aspiring Migrant group, interviewee Omar seemed the most convinced about his decision not to take the backway. He believes it has no use, as his friends that started the journey ten years ago, still have no improvement in their families. Therefore, Omar believes he can better invest in a future in his own country. Moreover, travelling via the backway is a big risk, according to Omar, because it is uncertain what will happen. He says it is possible that *'you end up dying or stuck in a refugee camp doing nothing'*. To limit the amount of youth taking the backway, perceptions of Gambians should change, according to him. Currently it is only possible to gain respect from the community being employed in a white collar job (in an office), while not everyone is suited for such a job. Doing anything to gain respect indicates, according to Omar, that there is a lack of self-empowerment among youth in the country. He has learned that succeeding in life depends on your ability to *'look outside the box'*.

2.1.2. Accelerate life plan through taking the backway

Among the young Gambian men I interviewed, I came across a lot of sentiments expressing feelings of being stuck in their personal development when they stay in The Gambia. Mains (2011) theoretically connects migration aspirations with experiential temporalities in his research among Ethiopian youth. His informants experienced unemployment as a problem resulting from how slowly time is unfolding in Ethiopia, and saw migration as a way of re-entering linear processes of progress through time. The possibility of migration held the promise of a spatial fix to a temporal problem. This perception is shared among several Gambian youths.

An example is Mohammed (FR), who seemed obsessed with Europe. He blames his surroundings in The Gambia for his failures. His father died when he was young, therefore he did not

have much education. All his friends left for Europe, therefore he only has children to socialize with in the neighbourhood. He calls his life in The Gambia *'a waste of time'*. Frustrated he said:

Black people they talk, talk, talk, but don't succeed, before they succeed they take time.(...) I am 27, so two years is left and I enter in 30 years, so it is not easy, a big man like me, 27 years without an account, just look at that. So first I get married and I open account, but those things take time.' (Mohammed, 01-05-2017)

Mohammed believes that by taking the backway to Europe, he would become able to complete his life plan quicker, saying: *'I don't want to sit here, I want to go and hustle.'* In The Gambia 'hustling' is used to describe livelihood strategies and informal income generating activities of young people (Ceesay 2016). Irregular migration is for Mohammed the solution to all his problems, it can fix spatially temporal problems. Migration means progress, according to him, while staying means standing still and not developing yourself.

The wise-looking Omar (FAM) blames this feeling of 'standing still' on many Gambian youths getting hardly any support with self-empowerment. He explained:

'Young people are not lazy or aimless, but support is lacking. (...) when they are empowered, the backway is not the solution. The solution is to stay in the country and engage in meaningful activities.' (Omar, 19-04-2017)

When I spoke to Mousa (FR) he seemed very motivated to work and support his parents and community financially, but he does not know how, therefore he often just sits with his friends to drink ataja (tea). He is afraid what the community thinks of him, as he said:

'I sit here for six year and do nothing, this is a big shame'

His low self-esteem also does not contribute to his productivity, as he said:

'I did not go to school, no work, so I had no use.' (Mousa, 05-05-2017)

Out of frustration of not being able to contribute financially to his family, he decided to take the backway in the hope that he would get opportunities in Europe to develop himself. Subsequently, he wishes to help other Gambians.

2.1.3. Competing with friends and brothers for respect

The fact that many Gambian children financially contribute to their parents is not only done out of the affection children have for their parents or vice versa, but they also have to contribute to get regarded by their family and the society (Ceesay, 2016, p. 199). The complex relations and expectations family members have of each other evoke a lot of incentives for jealousy. The seemingly depressed Ibrahima (FR) explained this phenomenon, by saying:

'we compete about our parents. (if we were brother and sister) Today I might give to my family, my parents will say it is a good daughter (son), but if you don't do that they will say this one... (nodding disapprovingly). It's that kind of life here, it's not easy.' (Ibrahima, 24-06-2017)

There is a lot of jealousy involved in this competition to contribute to the family, because the children experience that the one that contributes the most is appreciated the most. Mariama, the sister of an irregular migrant, explained how the family's distribution of affection affects the children, by saying:

'They say the one abroad is more aimful and ambitious. Those things will hurt the one at home, who is unable to go abroad, so if he cannot follow his brother legally, he will try to go illegally.' (Mariama, 31-05-2017)

Families show their children in Europe more off to the community than the ones in The Gambia. Youngsters are taught to look up to elders in Gambian society and hearing those kind of words will make them do anything to change their perceptions about them. Modou, the little brother of a migrant explained this phenomenon as follows:

'(If) they (elders) will tell you that you have no aim, no ambition, you are sitting here and doing nothing for the family. What the individual will say to himself is for him to die on the illegal journey is better than for him to sit here and hear such words that they don't appreciate him.' (Modou, 31-05-2017)

The down-hearted Abdoul C. (FR) is similarly to Ibrahima (FR), looking for validation from his family and he also believes that the differentiated amounts of respect children receive can instigate them to take the backway, as he said:

'The respect they try to look (give) at the people who are living in Europe and give them more respect than the people who are living in The Gambia, so this is some of the things that prompt so many people to use the backway to get to Europe, so at least they can also earn that respects, even with the little support that they will give to their families, because of the hope that the people will have in them, that they think the guy in Europe can do this and this and this.' (Abdoul C., 07-06-2017)

Abdoul believes the reason that the son in Europe will be higher regarded than the son in The Gambia, is because the family has more stakes in the son in Europe, even though this son might not contribute as much as the son in The Gambia at the moment. Mariama, a mother of a migrant, explained why she gives more respect to her son in Europe, as my translator translated for her:

'In fact, the respect that the parents are having here is the same respect that they (the migrants) also try to put into themselves so that they focus in the right way, so they would not involve themselves in the criminal acts and when they come back to The Gambia they would earn more respect because they would come back in a positive way and they would not be deported. (...) (otherwise) you lose your integrity when you come back to the society, so based on the respect is why most of them try to focus in the positive direction, because they are more respected.' (Mariama Bah, 07-06-2017)

By giving more respect to the son in Europe, the family hopes he will focus more on succeeding (in the legal way) in Europe. With the extra respect he will hopefully feel more pressure to fulfil the families expectations. Additionally, the son that is sent to Europe by the family, already has a higher

social status before embarking on the journey, otherwise they would not have picked him, as Ibrahim, brother of a migrant explained:

'Anybody that is send on this way have to be a trustworthy of the family, because he is representing the family and the family is spending on you. They expect you to bring something back, so it is only the hope of family.' (Ibrahim, 12-05-2017)

The son sent to Europe is thus the 'chosen one'. The family might appreciate this son the most, as they have hope in 'their lottery ticket'. Making it after migrating to Europe is the 'American dream' for Gambians, it is not reachable for many but they believe there is a fair chance for everybody to make it, no matter where you are from. The hope gives the whole family a perspective on another life.

Lamin Ceesay, program officer at YepAfrica, gave another explanation why parents have more respect for the son that took the backway, as he said:

'So you who is here, struggling every day, pulling out 50 dalasi or 100 dalasi every day, if you add that you are contributing more than the one in Europe. But still now people value the one in Europe more, because that guy will be in the position of sending a good amount of money once. It's just based on perception.' (Lamin Ceesay, 18-05-2017)

A single, substantial amount of money earned over a longer period given at once is more appreciated than small amounts given every day, even if the cumulated small amounts are more than the big amount.

The appreciation of Gambians in Europe starts from a young age, as the seven boys and girls between thirteen and fifteen years old I spoke to, all said that they are very proud of their brothers that took the backway. The dissimilarity in respect often instigates migrant aspirations with the son who stayed at home. Palloni et al. (2001) have found that when someone has family or friends that have migrated, they themselves are also more prone to migrate. The ambitious Causu D. (FR), for instance, said that he was inspired by his younger brother to take the backway, who embarked on the journey before him. He was possibly slightly jealous of him, as their parents were potentially more satisfied with the money the younger brother was sending occasionally than the salary Causu was bringing in monthly, although he answered negatively to this question. Similarly, the seemingly hopeless Saidu B. (AM) has a stepbrother, who took the backway successfully. He did not specifically mention that he is jealous of him, however it did seem that way as he was not satisfied with his own situation, he only experienced failures while he was looking for a job. The young men I interviewed would not easily admit to being jealous of a friend or brother, just like they would not easily admit being afraid to disappoint their parents, because they think it makes them appear dependent, emotionally weak and not strong-minded. In fear of appearing jealous or an emotionally weak person, the depressed-looking Ibrahim (FR) gives his friends advice about the backway journey, even though Ibrahim does want his friends to experience the same trauma as he experienced on the backway. He explained that he will not try to stop them from embarking on the journey, because, according to him, if he advised them not to go, they will think he is jealous of them having the opportunity to go.

Friends constantly compare socio-economic positions with each other in The Gambia. When they have the perception that the other is better off than they are, they show symptoms of relative

deprivation, they feel deprived of and/or entitled to having the same things. This phenomenon is exportable to the situation where someone's friend succeeds in completing the backway, consequently he wants to accomplish the same. Mohammed (FR), who is obsessed with Europe, is an example of this phenomenon, as he said:

'My two friends they go and less than two months they enter Italy. I am just sitting here doing nothing, let me just go with those people there.' (Mohammed, 01-05-2017)

Similarly, the impatient Abdoul K. (FR) explained:

'Most of my friends are not around, they all travel, most of them are lucky, they are not being deported. (...) later your friend will also move to a better friend. (...) No matter how close you are with a friend, if he travel and come back, he will leave you just like that, because you are not wealthy, you are lower class and the highest class is like this. You may visit each other, but the connection that was between you and him will never be the same, everything changes. First everyone was struggling, you are not expecting your friend to pay, you also have to pay.' (Abdoul K., 27-04-2017)

Abdoul sees it as a necessity that he also succeeds in completing the backway, otherwise he believes he would not be able to remain friends with his succeeded friends, as they would have moved up to a higher class. The last sentence shows that it is a social obligation in Gambian society that people who are wealthy contribute to their friends that are less wealthy. This could destroy the balance in the friendship and therefore youths believe the only solution is making friends that have a similar financial situation. The insecure and noble minded Mousa (FR) is jealous of his friends, as he said:

'(A) lot of friends they are succeeding (to get to Europe). They are building their parents good houses. (...) I feel happy because now their family is safe. I would also like that. (...) Their life is better. I see how their life is and I want also me and my family life to be like that. (...) Why can't I hustle to make life how they are.' (Mousa, 05-05-2017)

The last sentence makes clear that Mousa also feels entitled to try to accomplish succeeding in completing the backway.

2.1.4. Fluctuating migrant aspirations of Failed Returnees

Migrant aspirations can be subject to change (Schapendonk 2011). Having experienced the backway journey can have an influence on the migrant aspirations of failed returnees, they can either increase or decrease. After taking the backway many migrants become consciously focussed on reaching their goals. This (newly) found determination can change their behavioural patterns in two ways. Some returnees become extra focussed on their desire to try the backway again, as they have not accomplished their goal yet and others become strongly driven to make their lives in The Gambia successful. Mohammed (FR) belongs to the first group and in his perception he was/is very close to his goal, as he said:

'You know, I know this journey way very well, it is difficult for the people, but for me it is very easy for me, I never enter Libya but the border country, so from here to Niger is

not difficult for me, I already know the way, I know how to go, it is not difficult'.
(Mohammed, 01-05-2017)

The impatient Abdoul K. (FR) has the same determination, as he said:

'I already see the way, I know the journey, so next time I will go, I will prepare for it, because I am trying to go, but unfortunately I could not. I tried three times, for the fourth time I (will) succeed. (...) It took us almost eight months to produce this amount of money again and then we go again, the fourth time it will work.' (Abdoul K., 27-04-2017)

The other group of failed returnees is also more focussed on succeeding. However, not through taking the backway again. The seemingly depressed Salifo (FR), for example, said:

'Still you can make it, even here. Just have the courage in you and you can make it. (...) God did not gave you the luck to get inside of Europe, so you have to try and make it here.' (Salifo, 18-06-2017)

Some of The Gambian youths seem to become more ambitious after experiencing a lot of struggles on their journeys and/or they feel bad for spending their families' resources on the backway, which gives them an extra drive to earn money in The Gambia. This also applies to Ibrahima (FR). When I asked him how his personality changed by his experience of the backway, he answered:

'Now I only focus (...) My only target is to hustle, because (...) I don't want to depend on people. (...) Before I do football, but now I stopped football, because of the situation I have. (...) now I have the stress to hustle. I don't need to sit, because I know the difficulty I face and I know the experience I have there (on the backway), so I don't need to sit'. (Ibrahima, 24-06-2017)

At this moment, Salifo and Ibrahima are both focussed on getting success in The Gambia. This shows the changeability of migration aspirations. The failed attempts changed their intentions to migrate towards attempting to build a life in The Gambia. Ibrahima does not rule out that he will never try the backway again, however now he wants to try and get success in The Gambia. Staying/leaving are no longer binary opposites (Schapendonk 2011, p. 97), because if Ibrahima will experience that there is no perspective for him in The Gambia, his drive to accomplish something can easily translate back into migrant aspirations. Another factor that can influence the migrant aspirations are the trauma's experienced on the journey by returnees (see box 2).

Box 2: Traumatized Returnees

The EU makes increasingly restrictive migration policies to deter young Africans from migrating to Europe (Schapendonk 2011, p. 48; 2017). When migrants are not able to obtain a visa and travel to Europe by flight, they will embark on dangerous overland journeys through West and North Africa. The restrictive border controls between Niger, Mali and Algeria make trans-Saharan travellers more dependent on migration industries (Schapendonk 2011, p. 150). Migrant facilitating services range from exploitative smugglers to conventional transport businesses. These migration facilitators may mislead migrants. From the moment the bus to Mali crosses the border of The Gambia, every few kilometres the migrants have to pay at each police checkpoint. According to a smuggler my translator

spoke to, some drivers sell migrants to kidnappers who will only release the migrants when the migrants' families at home pay the ransom money. The migrants live in constant fear of being caught by armed gangs in Libya or by the police during their journey. When they get caught they have to survive in overcrowded prisons. There the migrants receive beatings and there is a lack of hygiene, food and water. The International Organization of Migration occasionally visits the prisons to give them the voluntary option to return home.

Dodou (FR) was voluntarily deported back to The Gambia. I interviewed him together with the motivated men Lamin (FR) and Mousa (FR). In contrast to them, Dodou looked depressed and seemed to repress his feelings. Full of energy, the other two men immediately answered all the questions I posed on the backway. Dodou, on the other hand, I had to spur up to get his opinion on the subject. At a young age Dodou convinced his mother that he should take the backway, because in his perception it was the only way for them to survive. He is now 18 years old, whilst his journey lasted for four years. His friends told him beforehand that the journey was not very difficult, however he explained that they must have had different experiences, because for him it was *'too painful'*. After the horrible experience he had in three different Libyan prisons, he decided to give up on the journey and return to his mother.

Back in The Gambia, he feels awkward that his friends pity him and he tries to comfort them, stating:

'sometimes I don't want to sit with them, they think about the backway and I say right now it is okay, as far as I am in my country'.

His mother is also worried about him and Dodou tries to hide his depression for her. He said:

'I don't want to cause her too much stress. I do stress but I don't want to show her. I don't like that. Only me alone can stress.'

Dodou does not want other people to experience the pain he went through, therefore he would never advise someone else to take the backway, as he said:

'I would not allow them to go, even though it was a person that does not even like me, that want to kill me, I will never allow him to go'. (Dodou, 05-05-2017)

However, he added that if nothing changes in one year (e.g. if he does not get a job) he would try the backway again.

2.2. Familial obligations

Family dynamics are largely influenced by cultural and religious values of Gambian society (Ceasay, 2016). There are cultural and religious norms on how a Gambian family should function. Youths feel pressured and controlled to conform to these norms. The desire and drive to conform is strongly dependent on someone's personal social worth, for if someone hardly has a feeling of self-empowerment and craves to gain social worth, they would for instance more easily grant their families' wishes for them to get married, even if they would rather not. Below, I will argue how family dynamics can influence and shape migrant aspirations. A feeling of familial obligation or social-cultural obligation, could make someone believe it is a necessity to provide their parents, other family members and people within the community with material support. Fulfilling these obligations

and having access to consumer goods, will get you a higher social status in the community (Ceesay, 2016). Children that are accused of not taking care of their parents are publicly criticised and risk a loss of reputation within their families and communities. This feeling of obligation thus derives from a will to get an enhanced social status.

2.2.1. Intergenerational reciprocity

Gambian society is based on intergenerational reciprocity, which means that from the moment children become self-reliant, they are expected to feed and care for their aging kin. Whitehead et al. (2007) describe intergenerational reciprocity as inter-family interactions involving a long-term balance of support and reciprocity. The families and communities in The Gambia have implicit and explicit expectations of youth that are influenced by gender-specific societal customs and norms (ibid:15). A large part of the Muslim community in The Gambia believe that the more children do for their parents, the more blessings/opportunities they will receive throughout their lives. This results in high rates of child labour and illiteracy, as children drop out of school at an early age to get a job to be able to contribute to their parents (Jones and Chant 2009). Once the children start making money, they get entangled in social pressures. They will quickly prioritize solving family problems above using their money to further their education (Ceesay 2016, p.218). With time, the poorly paid jobs of low educated Gambians become less satisfying to them or their parents, which results in them looking at other options, like irregular migration in search for better job opportunities or easily accessible education. Micro-evidence of the last decade indicates that most Africans migrate for family, work or study (Schoumaker et al., 2015; Bakewell & Jonsson, 2011). In Gambian society these three reasons for migration are very much connected to each other.

Aleou, a boy in secondary school whose brother took the backway, explained the obligation Gambian children feel towards their parents, as follows:

'Most of our parents were illiterates so thank God they have the mind to send us to school, so one day we have to take responsibility of the family and pay them back. When they get old they are not able to work because they worked physically. So they expect you as the child to have a good job or travel.' (Aleou, 31-05-2017)

Aleou argues that Gambian children of his generation are indebted to their parents, as they have given them opportunities the parents themselves did not get. However, the parents of the seemingly desperate Causu (AM) did not sent him to school, which was also the case for the other Aspiring Migrants. Still Causu feels it is his responsibility to pay his parents back for bringing him up, as he said:

'If you are unable to take care of your parents at that age (the age when your parents are getting physically weaker), people see you as aimless or a failure that could not even take care of his family or parents'. (Causu, 19-04-2017)

Causu believes that his reputation in the community depends on his ability to provide for the family. Mohammed (FR), Lamin (FR) and Dodou (FR) also feel pressure to provide for their families, as they are the heads of their families, since their fathers passed away when they were young. They all explained that this was also the reason why they had to drop out of school at a young age to find jobs. The impatient Mohammed (FR) feels the pressure of the expectations people have of him, as he said:

'At this moment my mom also is old, so at this moment they (the whole family) are all looking to me, so I don't want to sit here, I want to go and hustle, If I get money there, I will sent money for them, but now I sit here and I see my mom suffering. It is painful. So that's why on February 2016 I leave this country and go, but I went up to Niger I don't succeed and now I start fresh, so it is not easy.' (Mohammed, 01-05-2017)

Similarly, the seemingly-depressed Salifo (FR) feels the pressure of his parents' expectations of him, especially now he failed to reach Europe. My translator said about Salifo:

'Especially the father is paralyzed and very old also, the mom the same thing, so when they see them sitting down like this, chatting, then the parents feel it in them our children have tried but never made it. Still this is chance and they keep praying for them (...). But for them they still have the spirit that they can make it and the parents still give them the courage that still you can make it, even here.' (Salifo, 18-06-2017)

As 'a young guy', the down-hearted Abdoul C. (FR) also feels responsible to financially contribute to his family. He comes from a big, poor family, therefore he never went to school and was not able to get a job. When he saw other young people going through the backway and 'making huge changes' in their families' lives, he decided to embark on the journey together with his four friends. His family supported his decision and he was allowed to sell part of their compound to finance the journey. Unfortunately, after a horrible journey, three of his friends drowned in the Mediterranean and he was deported back to The Gambia.

Because of the hardship involved in migrating irregularly, embarking on the journey is the perfect way for a son to show his family that he would sacrifice anything to please them. With this thought the impatient Mohammed (FR) also took the backway, as he said:

'People see me they know I am suffering. I face many many things, I see many, many things, so now I have sympathy. Anywhere I go, people say yes this boy, (...) that boy has sympathy and discipline. (...) I go there for hustling to represent my family.' (Mohammed, 01-05-2017)

By taking the backway and using his own money for it, Mohammed does not have to feel ashamed that he did not make it, because he put his life on the line for the wellbeing of his family. Similarly, the noble-minded Mousa (FR) feels that he did not take the backway for himself, as he said:

'They (the community) all know why we left this country and how the country is, so the time we come back, they all respect, because they all know, we look for something for the country.(...) I want to suffer, because of the country. If it was only I, I would not have moved an inch. (...). I will try to go back again. The pain I felt, I will feel it again, no problem, if I see my guys (his family) live good life. I cannot live good life if my sisters are not, still I am living not a good life then.' (Mousa, 05-05-2017)

Mousa talks about his instrumental desire for migration, as he is willing to sacrifice his short-term individual wellbeing for the wish to improve the long-term wellbeing of his family (De Haas 2014). The Executive Director of the National Youth Council, Lamin Darboe, talked about the huge influence families can have on their children when they pressure them to provide, as he said:

'It can drive people from place to place. From the rural to the urban, from the urban to another country, even across the ocean. That pressure is so strong, it is even stronger than the waves of the Mediterranean.' (Lamin Darboe, 22-05-2017)

2.2.2. Risk spreading between family members

There are many jobs in The Gambia that cannot guarantee a stable income. There are multiple causes for this, for example the lack of workers protection makes some people's salaries dependent on their boss, farmers have to deal with droughts that can cause their harvesting to fail and people working in the tourist business have to take into account political instability that can cause less tourists visiting The Gambia (Castles 2010, p.11). Therefore households try to manage minimizing income risks by diversifying the family income. The concept of risk spreading challenges the idea that migration aspirations derive from individual efforts at income maximisation (De Haas 2014). This theory of the New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM) argues that households make cost/benefit analyses and decide based on that whether their family-member should migrate or not (Thompson 2017). Some Gambian families try to spread income risks by deciding together to send a son to Europe, who can consequently financially help the family out when necessary (Castles 2010, p.11). This is also the reasoning behind why Hawasi's family decided to send her son to Europe via the backway. They hoped that if he reached Europe, he would be able to financially support the family in times of need, because Hawasi's other child has health issues, which sometimes gives unforeseen expenses. My translator translated her, as he said:

'The child in Brikama is at grade 9 but she is also not healthy. (...) She may not be able to do hard work, hard jobs, so she has to get quality education, but sometimes she goes to school and the sickness will just hit her there (...)they have to struggle to get her to the hospital for treatment, where she sometimes spent two weeks, three weeks up to one month. (...) Her health is an issue taking much money of them. Based on that fact that they try to see how best they can support their (other) child to go through the backway.' (Hawasi, 12-05-2017)

The family of Hawasi looks at her children as investments and sees how they can profit from her children in the best way. This is necessary, as there is poor access to social benefits, therefore family members have to function as each other's social security system.

Families often send the son that is 'best-equipped', with the highest education and best job skills within the family, to migrate irregularly. They believe that this son can gain the highest income abroad, which can consequently be remitted and used to invest in other children or projects (de Haas & Fokkema, 2011, p. 776). This is also the reasoning behind why Mama Gité and her family financed the backway journey for a specific son of hers. My translator explained that she said:

'When a family is paying school for a child and paying lunch every day, they also monitor the kid very well, (...) to see how effective the child is at school. (...) out of the six, seven kids, only two went to school. Among these two, (...) one stopped at grade 9, because of the low earning of the family. The other one completed grade twelve and after completing (...) he was in the teaching field but the ambition the boy had in supporting the family financially, he was not earning that at the teaching field. That was the moment he decided to use the backway and they try to find some money to

ensure the boy is there. That is how it goes and they even sold some part of their land to support the boy that use the backway.' (Mama Gité, 12-05-2017)

The impatient Abdoul K. (FR) believes it is a necessity in The Gambia to have a family member in Europe, in order for the family income to be more stable, as he said:

'When you have someone abroad helping you to give some money, you can manage your life here, because I know almost of every family there is someone in Europe, you must have someone in Europe, helping with you with some, keep the family going'. (Abdoul K., 27-04-2017)

However, his family did not agree for him to take the backway. Despite that, Abdoul embarked on the journey, as he believes they will be happy once he succeeds. Abdoul came across as independent. He called the backway his *'own problem'*. The seemingly depressed Abdoul C. (FR) has the same attitude, however his family did support him mentally and financially to take the backway, but it was his decision to go, as the translator translated:

'Nobody put the idea in him, it was his decision, his idea and he finally decided based on when he looked at the compound and the family status how they are living, the amount of people there and the level of earning also.' (Abdoul C., 07-06-2017)

For these men it seems as if the choice to take the backway was a calculated decision. They believed that they would get work in Europe, so they could establish a more stable family income.

2.2.3. The family's collective decision-making and its limits

Ibrahim, the brother of an irregular migrant, explained the support between family members, as follows:

'Any kind of issues, someone get sick, someone passed away, someone have a ceremony, marriage or name ceremony, any activities you join together. You cannot do anything alone in Africa, it is too hard on you, you need family members, so you get what you want. Even in the educational level, family has to contribute, because you alone cannot make yourself learning or graduate. You have a brother or a father standing for you or maybe an uncle, anyone can contribute, anyone in a good position can help. That is how we do it in Africa, that is how our family goes.' (Ibrahim, 12-05-2017)

As families function as each other's social security system, it also means sometimes that the beneficiaries do not have much control over how the money is spent on them. The sponsors often want a say in their investments. Therefore, it happens within Gambian families that children are not allowed to make the decision in the choosing of their own education, careers and spouses. The amount of dictation children have in the decisions of the families often partially depend on their accomplishments in life and/or their age. Additionally, the amount of control someone within the family has is often also dependent on their financial contribution to the family. Ibrahim gave an example of decision making within a Gambian family, as he said:

'If your brother or uncle can help you to pay a school, if it come to married, they will still call this family, sit together, share ideas. For example if a girl want to marry, maybe the family will not appreciate the person, but sometime they appreciate, (then) it will not be a crime. But if a majority of the family does not appreciate this person, the marriage cannot be possible, because the power is no more yours. (...) You can even be given a wrong choice you don't like, but you have to cope with it, that is how we work it in the family.' (Ibrahim, 12-05-2017)

Collective-decision making in families can result in the decision that a particular member is chosen to take the backway. The seemingly depressed Ibrahima (FR) explained that he and his brother decided together for him to take the backway. His brother invested in both his education and his backway journey. Unfortunately, Ibrahima did not manage to reach Europe, he was deported back to The Gambia. When I interviewed him, he had been back for a few months, however he had not visited his brother yet. He explained that he is afraid to face him, because he feels ashamed that he was a bad investment. He also feels that he is a disappointment to his family, as he stated:

'That is why still I don't want to live with my family, because of the stress I have'. (Ibrahima, 24-06-2017)

Similarly, the down-hearted Abdoul C. (FR) explained he feels guilty towards his family, as the translator explained:

'He feels guilty that his parents spend their resources on him and finally he was not successful to go and now he is back, so anytime he sits alone, he is lonely, he thinks about this and feels guilty. Even now he feels guilty about it, like okay I used the backway and I feel my people, I did not succeed.' (Abdoul C., 07-06-2017)

Ibrahima and Abdoul feel ashamed and socially and financially indebted towards their families, because they lost the investment their families put in them. This can make failed returnees inclined to try the backway again and/or tell positive stories about their journeys, because they might think that their families would want to hear that their investments were at least worth something. The failed returnees probably do this to not come across as ungrateful, however these positive stories can stimulate more people to go. Additionally, I experienced in the interviews with returnees that it is difficult for them to acknowledge that the hardship they went through might not have been worth it.

Contrary to what has been previously said, there are also many Gambian families that are against their children taking the backway, because they do not want them to experience the horrors on the journey. This is also the reason why Saidou B. (AM) did not inform his parents when he tested the waters of the backway. He embarked on the journey, driven by his feeling of hopelessness for the future and his boyhood dream of going to Europe. He went up to Mali without informing his parents. When he finally called them, his mother urged him to come back, which he did. The same thing happened to Modou, the brother of an irregular migrant, as he explained:

'So I was on the way going two to three days and I was already in Mali. (he got a bit emotional) So my mom calls on the way, she was crying and she could not even

explain nothing to me, just only cry, so I sit down and I said to myself I am heading to something I don't know to be frank and it is life or death.' (Modou, 31-05-2017)

Modou therefore also returned. However, according to the other three Aspiring Migrants next to Saidu B., in most cases where parents were initially against their children taking the backway, once the child has already embarked on the journey and spent money on it, they will not demand him to come back. On the contrary, mostly they will send him money to continue and they will be very happy when their child succeeds. Similarly, the impatient Abdoul K. (FR) explained:

'The family is everything, but I could not tell my mom about the backway, because my family would not let me go. If I make it I will call them, if I went to Europe they will appreciate it, but my going they would not like it, because it is risky, you see, but they are my backbone. (Abdoul K., 27-04-2017)

In the end Abdoul was deported back to The Gambia and even though his parents were against him taking backway in first instance, they were still very disappointed when he failed, as Abdoul said:

'I was not really happy when I came back, because my family was also not happy, they did not know I was going but when I called them to say I was in Spain, they were very happy, yeah they were very happy that I was in Spain, but when they deported us back to Senegal and I called them to tell them that I am in Senegal, they are not happy.' (Abdoul K., 27-04-2017)

The seemingly depressed Salifo (FR) also knew his parents would in first instance not support him taking the backway. Independent, as he came across, he still decided to go. Similar to Abdoul, he thought that his parents would appreciate his decision to take the backway, the moment when he would succeed in getting into Europe. Unfortunately for Salifo, he did not make it and for him the backway turned out to be a *'waste of time and resources'*. Additionally, now his family even feels *'bad'* that he failed.

Because these young men knew the collective decision of their families, not wanting their children to take the backway, these men decided not to talk about their wish to embark on the journey and they just left in the hope that their families' opinions about the backway would change. Even though the decision for migration is often made within/under influence of social networks, it is important to keep being aware of the individuality within the decision to migrate. The parents of Saidu B. (AM) and Modou did not change their opinion about migration after their sons embarked on the backway and they urged them to return. Maybe partially because these young men are still under the direct influence of their parents, they respected their wish for them to return to The Gambia, even though they still aspire to go to Europe. The parents of Salifo and Abdoul K. might have indirectly pressured them towards the decision to migrate, as they feel bad that in the end their sons did not succeed in the backway. However, there was no direct pressure from the family with Abdoul, as he said about his decision to take the backway:

'I don't want to tell them (his family) that, it is my own problem, (...) nobody is forcing me, nobody is telling me what to do.' (Abdoul K., 27-04-2017)

Abdoul feels very independent. He made the decision to take the backway, because he feels like he has to bear the burden of the decision making himself. He is responsible for his decision, however

implicit family pressures might play a role in the decision making. Families can play a passive role in the decision of a son to migrate irregularly. A family can inspire migrant aspirations when they give children that are in Europe more respect or even if they raise their son with the idea that it is his duty to provide for the family financially once he becomes self-reliant. The built up stress this causes can become a motivating factor for the son to migrate irregularly, as the image exist in Gambian society that migration is connected to making money (see next chapter).

Migration can also be seen by Gambian youths as a way to escape the social control and oppression within families. Alhasan (AM) is a good example of this. According to him, the main reason behind his wish to take the backway is that he would like to be able to save some money for himself, because now his parents claim all the money he earns and they spend it all on commodities. Therefore, he sees no other option than taking the backway, because then he can respectfully leave their house and escape their control over him. Similarly, the ambitious Causu D. (FR) wants to escape the social control of his parents. This is the reason that he embarked on the journey, even though he had a good job when he left, according to him. The problem was that his parents spent all the money he earned. To live up to his parents expectations, but also to be able to save some money for himself, he thought it would be best to leave to make *'fast money'* in Europe.

2.2.4. Relative deprivation between families

Relative deprivation can emerge for instance when one family in a Gambian community feels another family gets an opportunity to enhance their socio-economic position. The first family can feel deprived of and/or entitled to the same opportunity. Lamin Sainey, the district community chairperson of the Kombo East Youth Development Alliance (KEYDA), is not surprised why parents want their children to take the backway, as he said:

'If you go to Facebook you see some of these young guys that went to Italy or Germany or other countries and they post pictures, where sometimes even they just go somewhere to take a picture before houses, luxury cars other stuff. (...) even if it is not their stuff. (...) Even though some sleep in cartons or in stores. But what we see is what we try to analyze.' (Lamin Sainey, 18-05-2017)

Jealousy instigated by social media caused Mariama's (girl in secondary school) brother to take the backway, as she said:

'I have a brother, a cousin that had a friend who went on the backway journey and he succeeded and sent nice photos of new clothes. My brother think he is not more courageous or brave than I am, (therefore) I can also embark on the journey.' (Mariama, 31-05-2017)

The perceived achievements of migrants raise the expectations of the community towards all young men, pressuring them to at least cultivate an ambition to emigrate to appear to be purposeful, wanting to improve their families condition (Waldie 2006). Lamin Sainey elaborated further on how these perceptions on achievements of migrants stimulate families to pressure their children to take the backway, as he said:

'Also big beautiful girls we have in our communities are all for people that embark on irregular migration issues. Hardly we have very beautiful wives, because expectations

are high on those that embark on the journey. Thinking fully well that they will be sending euro's and dollars for us to receive at Western Union and make life change and everything. (...) Especially during Ramadan, Tobaski, Christmas and others, they have to send money for them to come and collect. Those that (do not) have their young ones there, will find it difficult to do some of those expenditures during those festivities moments. That might even give them some misconceptions. It eventually leads them to force their kids to also go.' (Lamin Sainey, 18-05-2017)

As Lamin Sainey explained, before the social events take place there is a lot of pressure on the young men to contribute financially to the family. There are a lot of social events in Gambian society such as naming ceremonies, funerals, Muslim feasts like Tobaski and Korithe. These feasts are expensive events, as it is expected to buy new clothes for the occasion and to buy cows, rams or chickens to eat for the guests. These feasts are a time to show off to the community and if you cannot afford it then it is better to stay at home, as my friend and colleague at Yep Africa, Serreh, explained. Families get so jealous of other families who have children in Europe to support them, that they might even pressure their own kids to embark on the dangerous route to Europe. Mariama, mother of an irregular migrant, and her husband really want their children to take the backway. My translator explained what she said about her son that is already on the way:

'the boy was having the intention to help them, so with that intention if I get to Europe, I can support my parents. They want him to be there, so that he can give support back, because they have seen others doing the same thing for their parents.' (Mariama Bah, 07-06-2017)

The feeling of relative deprivation can emerge between families, but also within families (which is already explained under social worth). The strong feeling of jealousy can lead to migrant aspirations. My colleague, Lamin, of Yep Africa believes relative deprivation between families could lead to more migrant aspirations, as he said:

'Massive poverty leads to ungratefulness, so you and your neighbour (...) all have the same condition in terms of life, the advancement of life conditions, but suddenly one of your neighbours child travelled to Europe and today he is able to make some changes back home. So obviously that will psychologically influence the mindset of the other family to also look for solutions to support their child or to finance the trip so that the child can also support back when he or she is settled.' (Lamin Ceasay, 18-05-2017)

The family with the son in Europe acquires a higher socio-economic status in the community which instigates jealousy with their neighbours, who will consequently be more prone to send their son to Europe. Castles and Miller (2009) argue that the remittances the migrants send home are often invested in luxury items like expensive houses and cars, therefore it will not lead to inclusive sustainable development in the community and it only creates more inequality. In the long-term former producers, in families with migrants abroad, will become consumers of remittances money and this leads to inflation of basic goods for those who have not migrated. Consequently, the relative deprivation between families motivates more people to migrate and in the long term the community will almost only depend on a remittances economy (Castles and Miller 2009).

Box 3: Luck and Faith

The migrant aspirations of Gambian youths relate often to non-rationalities such as chance, luck and believe. Faith in God can give young people the courage to actually embark on the dangerous journey and it can also give parents some peace of mind. Mariama, the mother of an irregular migrant is aware of the dangers on the backway, about the deaths in the sea, the migrants who are locked in prison and tortured to death or who died out of hunger, although my translator translated why she still encourages her son to embark on the journey, as follows:

'With all this she knows that everything will happen if it has to happen to you, whether you are living in your own house, if you have to die or death has come, then you will die, no matter what, so the only thing that they (the parents) need to do is to pray for their children when they start the journey, you pray more.' (Mariama Bah, 07-06-2017)

Mariama believes in predestination, that God has a strict plan for everyone, which makes her less afraid of the dangers on the backway. According to her, if someone dies it would also have happened when they would have stayed in The Gambia. She believes that she can only slightly influence her son's destiny with praying that nothing bad will happen. Similarly, the seemingly depressed Ibrahima (FR) has a lot of faith in God and believes it is His decision that he did not succeed in the getting to Europe (yet). The hope and trust in God influenced Ibrahima's decision to embark on the journey. The believe in an afterlife can influence migrants in their risk-taking. Also the down-hearted Dodou (FR) believes God has a life plan for him. About his search for a job he said:

'Let's leave it to God. God knows what will happen tomorrow.' (Dodou, 05-05-2017)

If you believe that you cannot significantly influence your own fate, it can influence the amount of effort you put in everything. Dodou also believes he cannot influence the fate of others, as he talked about the fear of other youths experiencing the pain he experienced on the backway:

'Right now a friend also went, I feel sorry for him and worry about him, because I know the pain and suffering. Every time I worry, but God decide your fate.' (Dodou, 05-05-2017)

Dodou reminds himself that he cannot influence someone else's fate. His friend got an opportunity to travel, therefore it is God's will and plan for him to do so. This perception could keep Dodou from actively trying to discourage his friend to take the backway.

Believe in a Marabout, a future teller, traditional healer and some kind of sorcerer in Gambian society, can influence the decision of youth to take the backway. Many potential migrants believe that giving out charities, determined by a Marabout, will increase their luck on the journey. A human trafficker, I spoke to, advises his clients to visit a Marabout before embarking on the journey. If they say that the 'road is not clear', then you just have to give out some charities to people on the streets and you are good to go. The impatient Mohammed (FR), who is obsessed with Europe, believes a Marabout could have influenced his luck on the backway. Therefore, he did not tell anybody in the community that he was going to take the backway, because, according to him, they would have been jealous and would have cast a spell over him at the Marabout. He explained:

'(I told) no friends, because some people pretend they like you and if you tell them they can do something. You know, African people they are not good, some are good, but others not.'

You tell them after you succeed, because if you tell them before you succeed some people are bad they do bad thing, so before you succeed you will suffer.’ (Mohammed, 01-05-2017)

The fact that he thinks his friends would even curse him and not begrudge him any success, exemplifies his low self-worth.

Many Gambian youths believe that life exists out of opportunities and if you are lucky an opportunity (to travel) will come to you, which can make them reluctant to actively try to shape their own future. On the other hand, the believe in luck can also inspire migrant aspirations among disadvantaged youths. For instance, the seemingly hopeless Saidu (AM), who had little education, believes that everyone is fit to take the backway and that it only depends on luck if you succeed, as he said:

‘it is not your strongness that gets you to cross, it is just chance’. (Saidu, 19-04-2017)

The positive thing about this believe is that for instance the down-hearted Salifo (FR) does not blame himself for failing on the backway, as he stated:

‘It’s just chance that I was not lucky to be in’. (Salifo, 18-06-2017)

Believe that it is luck instead of faith that determines if someone fails to complete the backway can instigate people to try again multiple times. Salifo, however, also believes it is God who determines the lucky ones reaching Europe. Something as unpredictable as luck can thus also go together with the believe in a predetermined life plan by God.

2.3. Concluding remarks

In this chapter I tried to discover main aspects in the Gambian society that create the local-level immigration environment and how they shape migrant aspirations of youths, which can result in them taking the backway. The backway is mainly seen as an instrument for youth to gain upward social mobility. They feel stuck in their lives, because many youths who take the backway did not have much education and therefore they feel useless, as they fail to secure (good) jobs. The backway is seen as a challenge to prove themselves as independent ‘real men’, they sacrifice themselves in search for giving their families better lives. The desire to provide for their families does not necessarily result out of affection, but by doing this heroic act (taking the backway), the community will start to see them as adults with discipline and aim. A traditional Gambian believe is that the more you do for your parents, the more blessings you will receive in your own life. Therefore, many children drop out of school at a young age to try and find a job. Consequently they get entangled in social pressures and prioritize solving family problems before investing in their own life. Migrating can be seen as a way to fulfil familial expectations, but also as a way to escape familial pressures and finding the freedom abroad to invest in themselves and their education. Youths can also be inspired to embark on the journey by friends that successfully completed the backway and by other societal pressures to conform to certain norms. They are afraid these friends will no longer want to be friends with them, as they moved up to a higher class and therefore they would feel awkward to still hang out with them, because it is a custom that you financially assist a friend who is poorer than you. Another societal pressure is getting married at a certain age, although young men are sometimes reluctant to do this, as it would harm your social reputation if you do not have the means to take good care of your wife. Some youths try to escape this pressure by migrating. Another pressure to migrate arises from the competition between siblings in the financial contribution to the family.

Families often give more regard to the son that migrated, even if the son in The Gambia is contributing more. The reason for this is that the family often has invested more in the one that took the backway and they project their hope of a better life on him or they give him more regard in order to pressure him to contribute back to the family with money earned in a legal way, as the reputation of the whole family depends on him.

Migrant aspirations are never fixed and they can change after experiencing the backway and being deported. It can make someone even more driven to complete the backway, as they know the route, or it can make them driven to succeed in life in The Gambia, as they would rather not want to go through that misery again.

Taking the backway is not always entirely the choice of the migrant himself. Due to poor social benefits Gambian families have to function as social security systems and therefore they sometimes collectively choose to send 'the best-equipped' son on the backway to spread the risks in the family income as they often have to deal with unforeseen expenses. Children are treated as investments. The family member that contributes most has often the most say in the life choices of the children. Sometimes children take the backway to escape this social control respectfully. Besides, this also gives them the opportunity to choose how they spend their own money (sometimes entire salaries have to be given to the parents to distribute). Some youths who took the backway, because the family collectively decided thus, but they failed to complete it, feel ashamed that they did not realize the investment, which could instigate them to try the journey again until they succeed. Other youths leave without informing their families who disapprove of the backway, as they know their families will be happy once they succeed. When they fail to complete it, some families are still disappointed in them. This exemplifies indirect pressure of the family behind these youths to take the backway. Perceived achievements of young people who took the backway can instigate jealousy with families that do not have children who took the backway and consequently they will also pressure them to go.

Besides that the faith in God can ease the worrying of the parents who have children on the backway as they believe that God decides on everybody's fate and has already a fixed plan for everyone. Faith in God can influence risk taking of migrants. Many Gambians believe that a Marabout can assist in giving a migrant more luck on his journey. The believe in Marabouts can also withhold youth from telling people they are going to take the backway, as they are afraid of jealousy which can drive people towards putting a curse on them. Lastly, some youths believe success on the journey depends on the amount of luck someone has. This could make them think that anyone is fit to take the backway and it can encourage them after failing to try again multiple times. In conclusion, migrant aspirations are shaped and can fluctuate under influence of familial and societal dynamics. The choice for migration is highly subjective and is influenced by someone's socio-economic and cultural context. It is not solely an individual's choice, but rather a product of an individual's embeddedness in a wider social context, which counters the idea of rational individual decision making for migration. The empirical data has shown the social pressures linked to prevalent outmigration. Social pressures also shape youths' becoming and their aspirations of life in and beyond their home.

Chapter 3: Migrant aspirations shaped through geographical imaginaries and images of Europe and The Gambia

As stated by De Haas (2014) 'most people migrate in the expectation to find better opportunities at the destination' (p. 8). This statement applies to Gambian youths who have migrated irregularly, however, the reason behind their will to migrate is far more complex and it is also influenced by their socio-cultural heritage. The EU refers to poverty as the main reason for people to migrate from Sub-Saharan Africa to Europe (de Haas 2014). De Haas (2014) argues, however, that this idea is naïve, because poverty is not new to this region. Somehow, through the exposure to multiple pieces of information young Gambians get motivated to migrate irregularly. The context someone is in and the information that is available to them, shapes their notion of the good life, hence, their personal life aspirations. Modern means of communication, like internet and TV, depict Europe as a place of wealth and luxury. In the minds of young Africans Europe becomes an ideological concept (Schapendonk and Van Moppes 2007, p.9). It makes them believe that there are better opportunities for them elsewhere. Migration aspirations are thus dependent on youth's general life aspirations, which are discussed in chapter two, and the perceptions about whether these aspirations can be fulfilled 'here' (in The Gambia) and 'there' (in Europe) (Flahaux and De Haas 2016, p.4). The question I will try to answer in this chapter is: Which images do Gambian youths have about the geographical environments of Europe and The Gambia and how do these perceptions influence migrant aspirations?

The subjective ideas about geographical environments are also formed through relations under the influence of cultural values and social processes in society, which makes those ideas prone to change (Castles 2010; Flahaux and De Haas 2016). Through media like Whatsapp and Facebook people across the world can influence each other without temporal or financial barriers. In The Gambia this has led to an increase in material aspirations for consumer goods among youth (Ceesay 2016). Comparing the images Gambians have of Europe versus the images they have of The Gambia will help to understand why youths take the backway.

Firstly, I will elaborate on how Gambian youths imagine Europe to be like and why these images lead to developing migrant aspirations. Accordingly, I will discuss how imaginaries instigate youths to actually take the backway and how the image on the European visa policy contributes to that decision. Then I will elaborate on how the images on Europe are embedded in Gambian society and how the confrontation with the reality influences migrant aspirations. Secondly, I will discuss how Gambian youths see The Gambia compared to their image of Europe and how they see The Gambia compared to Africa. I will elaborate on how these comparisons inspire migrant aspirations.

3.1. Images and Imaginaries of Europe

Many Gambian youths believe the backway is the route to getting a good life. Lamin Darboe, the executive director of the National Youth Council, explained how this imaginary has become embedded in Gambian society, as he said:

'This perception is placed over time through various platforms. From childhood what we see in the media, videos, television. We only see the best of Europe. We have seen the flashing cars, the beautiful roads, the storey buildings, the restaurants, (...) the

supermarkets, we have seen the beautiful people, the nice roots, the affluence and extravagance have been well displayed.' (Lamin Darboe, 22-05-2017)

It is very difficult to change the paradise-like images of Europe, as these images are omnipresent in 'daily life, daily interconnections between the South and the North, daily businesses, daily television broadcasts, daily telephone calls, daily church visits, daily confrontations with history, and daily advertisements' (Schapendonk 2011, p. 88). Similarly, Aleou, a boy in secondary school whose brother took the backway, explained how he and his friends constructed their image about Europe, as he said:

'Europe you know, the way we see it on tv and computers as well, so the same time we learn in school, their weather, climate and so on. All those things are very attractive. So everyone wants to at least go to Europe and experience some of those things.' (Aleou, 31-05-2017)

Popular media, but also schools contribute to (mis)representing the paradise image of Europe. According to Schapendonk (2011), this image is partially resulting from the African educational systems being largely oriented towards the 'West' (p. 86). These idealized images inspire youths' life aspirations and simultaneously they also adjust their desires to the images (Salazar 2011). This happens through discussing the images with their friends and family and comparing them against images they have of their own country. Almost all the youths I interviewed experience a lack of jobs and low salaries in The Gambia. Many youths in The Gambia have been reinventing their identities in the spaces of waithood, as they could not find a job, through popular Western mass culture. They have engaged themselves in an imagined global world. Modou, another boy in secondary school whose brother took the backway, also adjusted the images of a wealthy Europe to his aspirations and vice versa, as he said:

'they consider wealth a lot in this generation so that is pushing us to embark on this journey. We believe that it is so much easier when you are there than here. There are job opportunities, wealth establishment.' (Modou, 31-05-2017)

Aleou and Modou relate themselves to the imagined environment of Europe, as these young people admire and are submerged in Western popular culture (Benson 2012). Over time the individually experienced images of Europe become socio-culturally constructed imaginaries (O'Reilly 2014). These collective imaginaries of a better way of life, or a possible future, motivate migration (Appadurai 1996; Benson 2012; Salazar 2011; Vigh 2009). Appadurai (1996) stated that 'imagination, especially when collective, can become the fuel for action' (1996, p.7). The idealized image of Europe and the lack of chances in The Gambia to prove yourself as an adult to the community, stimulates more youths to choose irregular migration.

3.1.1. Common images of Europe and how they shape migrant aspirations

Most of the youths I interviewed are, first of all, attracted to Europe, because they believe wealth is easily acquirable there. Secondly, they believe all Europeans are inherently good people that take great care of Gambian migrants and thirdly, in their opinion, education is of better quality and more easily accessible in Europe than in The Gambia. The English and History Teacher at the University of The Gambia and author of the book 'Horrors of the backway', Michael Hamadi, talked about the first

image as he said that Gambian youths take the backway, because they believe it will make them 'rich overnight'. Similarly, Lamin Sainey, a district board member of the Kombo East Development Alliance (KEYDA) that works on reducing irregular migration, explained about the power of this imaginary when he replied to my question about the drives behind young people taking the backway. He said:

"Gambia earnings are very less and expectations are very high when they (youth) see pictures of Europe, they say: 'all that awaits us is gold'." (Lamin Sainey, 18-05-2017)

In the 1960s and 1970s social success in The Gambia was evaluated by educational qualification and gaining access to state positions, whereas in neo-liberal Gambia success is measured more by consumption in the form of driving new cars, building big houses and distributing cash to family members and other people in the community (Ceesay 2016). African youths nowadays believe that through migrating you can skip the phase of effort and learning and still achieve social and economic advancement (Ludl 2008). Migration is seen as a gateway to economic advancement and social success. A possible explanation is the involvement of young Afro-American men in popular culture nowadays, which creates imagined worlds for young Africans and makes them believe that the social and economic success that these artists enjoy is also attainable for them if they migrate (Appadurai 1996; Jónsson 2008). The impatient Abdoul K. (FR), whose friends already successfully completed the backway, has high expectations of Europe, as he said:

'if you travel to Europe and come back they respect you, money is everything, it can buy the people, if you have it you are okay much more respect than the poor.'
(Abdoul K. 27-04-2017)

Firstly, Abdoul thinks that if you travel to Europe you will become automatically rich. Additionally, the community will assume you have money if you visited this place. This will in turn lead to gaining more respect within the community, according to Abdoul.

Just like Abdoul, Mohammed (FR) is obsessed with Europe. He also believes it is very easy to get money in Europe, as he said:

'even Italy, if you sit in the camp for one year, every month they pay 300 euro and if you change it to Gambian dalasi, it is 1500, just 300 euro. So if you are just in the camp in Italy not working but just sitting there, it will be more than enough.'
(Mohammed, 01-05-2017)

However, in Italy refugees that started an asylum procedure get 75 euro's allowance each month to spend as they like (RTLnieuws 2015). The argument that it is easy to get rich when you migrate to Europe, because the euro has more value than The Gambian currency, was used multiple times by the youth from all the categories. Especially all the Aspiring Migrants are convinced that if they would send money from Europe, their families would profit enormously. However, they fail to take into account that life and commodities in Europe are also much more expensive than in The Gambia.

Similar to Mohammed (FR) and Abdoul (FR), Modou (FAM) believes that if you want to become rich, you have to be based in Europe. He told that travelling to Europe is the way to becoming a millionaire. He also said:

'If you go to Europe for five years and you come back to The Gambia, you can sit for 20 years'. (Modou, 19-04-2017)

Modou currently is the owner of a vegetable garden, however, he is still not sure of his decision not to take the backway, because he believes that any amount of money you make in The Gambia, it will never be respected by the community as much as the money you make in Europe. He said:

'If they (the community) see a nice compound, they will first ask: where is this guy from, rich or poor background? (When the guy earned the money by) working in the street (in The Gambia), they will say: those are all criminals. If you (earned the money because you) use the backway to Europe, you are the man, they respect you more.' (Modou, 19-04-2017)

Similarly, the ambitious and somewhat naïve Sainey (FR) took the backway, because of socio-economic motivations, as he said:

'If I can go to Europe, I can have an extended family, bigger (...) second, third wife, because we accept that.' (Sainey, 05-04-2017)

Being able to afford more than one wife is connected to gaining more respect from the community. Sainey did not take the backway for the money itself, but for the status that is attached to (European) money in Gambian society, as he said:

'If you came to Europe, even without money they will give you more respect. (...) People think everyone that go to Europe, they will have money. That is our local concept. If you go to Europe you have money.' (Sainey, 05-04-2017)

The image these four young men have of Europe could be partially based on seeing the lives of older former migrants that migrated to Europe. They migrated in a time when it was easier to get a visa or in the case of the United Kingdom, former colonizer of The Gambia, a visa was not required until 1996. These returnees are now in their 50s and 60s and they invested their money, from working in Europe, in The Gambia and are now able to live in big houses (Ceesay 2016). Next to that, the image is strengthened by seeing the many wealthy tourists that visit The Gambia. Even though these tourists have relatively low or middle incomes in Europe, they can spend a lot of money on their holidays due to the high value of the euro in The Gambia. The seemingly depressed Ibrahima (FR) also believes all Europeans are rich, as he said:

'the people who live there (in Europe), even you see them, you will know Europe is nice or Europe is blessed.' (Ibrahima, 24-06-2017)

All the Aspiring Migrants I spoke to are especially drawn to Europe for its 'strong and powerful money'. They were all eager to make money and subsequently invest this money in their own country, in order for more Gambians to benefit from their endeavour. It is remarkable that this was the only group where nobody could specify more besides the money what it was exactly that they liked about Europe (Below I will explain this phenomenon more).

Secondly, an imaginary that frequently returned in the interviews was that Europeans will take good care of African irregular migrants. The responsible-looking Lamin (FR) believes that there are no bad Europeans, as he said:

'I don't know nothing about bad thing in Europe, because they are good, they are good people'. (Lamin, 05-05-2017)

The down-hearted Dodou (FR) took the backway when he was only fourteen years old and he experienced a lot of hardship and trauma when he was locked in Libyan prisons. This happened multiple times, but he persevered, as he said:

'If you see my friends in Europe, they have forget all those awful things. What about me, it is not easy to forget. If I am in Europe right now, because of the good care of the Europeans, I forget about all of these things.' (Dodou, 05-05-2017)

Dodou believes the good care of the Europeans can miraculously dissolve all his pain.

Just like Dodou, Ibrahima (FR) took the backway in the hope that he could afterwards provide for his family, even though he was not raised by his family, he is continuously trying to prove his worth to his family. With the care of Europeans, he thinks he can make this dream come true, as he said:

'In Europe they take care of you (...) If you don't have work, they will teach you and you will learn and they give you some work, whereby you benefit.' (Ibrahima, 24-06-2017)

The imaginary that Europeans will just give irregular migrants education, work and money, without them having to do much effort for it, is shared by Dodou as he said:

'Europe generally they care people, they give you good life, good education, good taking care. If I reach this place I can get good salary.' (Dodou, 05-05-2017)

The imagined generosity of Europeans might have been stretched from Gambian societal values. If it is lunch time in The Gambia, it is common that people will invite even strangers to join them to eat from their meal. Ismael (FAM) was surprised and a bit outraged that these values are not shared everywhere, as he said:

'In The Gambia everybody invites you for lunch. My friend went to neighbour country and nobody invites him so he just put hand in bowl and they said stop, wait for your name.' (Ismael, 19-04-2017)

Gambians are known for sharing everything with their communities and aspiring migrants might expect that with the economic prosperity in Europe, if they move there, the Europeans will share what they have with them. Young Gambians get that illusion, because they have experienced the kindness of the Europeans living in The Gambia (working at NGOs) giving aid to poor families.

The third most common image of Europe among the interviewed youth is that there is good, cheap and easily accessible education there. As stated before, many Gambian youths that take the backway dropped out of school at a young age to take care of their families. As they get older, they often dream to go back to school to further their personal development. However, they experience this to be impossible as they have committed to many other responsibilities (explained in previous chapter). They think they can evade these responsibilities by going to Europe to further their education. Modou (FAM) is an example of a youth who believes education is more easily accessible in Europe than in The Gambia. Although Modou's migrant aspirations are currently mainly formed

because he believes he can make more money in Europe, before, he wanted to take the backway to further his education in Europe. Back then his parents were struggling to pay for his school fees and he heard rumours that education in Europe was very cheap and sometimes even free. Around the same time a friend offered to support him financially to further his education in The Gambia and therefore he stayed and could start his vegetable garden. Also the flighty Buba's (FAM) migrant aspirations never completely disappeared. He finished his secondary school in The Gambia. However, despite his diploma he has no hope of getting a job. Therefore, he wants to migrate to Europe, to further his education even more. He believes that in Europe, education is easily accessible and of higher quality. Currently, the only thing keeping him in The Gambia is his believe that the new government will improve the situation in The Gambia. However, his dream to go to Europe is deeply rooted within him, as he has already been fantasizing about the place when he was a child. Next to the *'the education system'*, he likes *'the weather'* and *'the money there'*.

In contrast to the Aspiring Migrants, the Formerly Aspiring Migrants spoke not solely positive about Europe. The difference between Aspiring Migrants and Formerly Aspiring Migrants is that the Aspiring Migrants only disclosed positive imaginaries about Europe, while the Formerly Aspiring Migrants also expressed their negative imaginaries about Europe. Modou (FAM) does not like that European society revolves around time. Additionally, he claims that people hardly socialize in Europe. He thinks it is strange that friends have to make an appointment to see each other in Europe, because in The Gambia people pay each other visits that are not pre-arranged. Modou also believes that it is easy to lose your life in Europe, because of *'the guns like in America'*. Lastly, he dislikes the fact that *'less people focus on Islam'* in Europe. Nevertheless, there is still more happiness in Europe, according to Modou. Abdoul (FAM) believes that the discrimination of black people is to the extent in Europe that the police shoots innocent black people. He states:

'you can lose your life there easy...most thing I hate is the way they treat black people, police shoot a black man'. (Abdoul, 19-04-2017)

Both Abdoul and Modou have probably seen American news items about the American police shooting Afro-Americans and about mass shootings happening in the United States, because guns are more accessible to the public there. Apparently, they see Europe as a similar place to the US. Omar's (FAM) image of Europe is also not entirely positive. In The Gambia it is difficult to obtain a travel visa for Europe. According to Omar, visas are almost only accessible to married people. Therefore, he argues that in order to get these travel documents when you are not married, you will have to lie and deceive. This leads, according to Omar, to a higher crime rate in Europe than in Africa, because besides married people, only criminals obtain visas. Possibly, these Formerly Aspiring Migrants are partly discouraged to take the backway, because they believe these negative imaginaries about Europe. This can imply that if their negative imaginaries change, due to gossip or other forms of information, they might get renewed migrant aspirations. On the other hand, the Aspiring Migrants are stimulated to embark on the journey, because of their positive imaginaries about Europe. These imaginaries can also change into more negative images if deported migrants that experienced Europe refute their fantasies.

3.1.2. The perception of one integrated space of Europe

In all the quotes above the interviewees refer to dreaming to go to 'Europe', instead of a specific country in Europe. Their migrant aspirations are abstract and lack concrete direction. There were just

two of the interviewees that named specific countries in Europe where they wanted to go. One was the ambitious Causu D. (FR) who said he wants to go to Sweden, Germany, Austria or England. That he named specific countries might have to do with the soccer teams these countries have, as he wants to pursue a professional soccer career in Europe. However, many Africans experience Europe as one integrated, borderless space (Schapendonk 2011). Reaching 'Europe' means gaining social success, economic progress, freedom and adventure (Schapendonk 2011, p. 81). Causu D. (FR) desires to be seen as 'the big man'. Even though he failed to reach Europe, he was proud to say that the community now calls him '*malong*', which means someone who travelled to Europe and came back. He explained that it did not matter that he has not actually been to Europe, because it is believed by the community that Libya is similar to Europe, since they have a comparable lifestyle. Although Causu knows the view of the community about Libya is wrong, he does not correct it, as he is proud that they call him *malong*. He said:

'In Libya before, they were also living like Europe, like (for instance) if you have a baby, the baby will be paid, the government will be paying the baby until the guy became 18 years old. Since the loss of Gaddafi, the former president, that is no more happening there.' (Causu D., 18-06-2017)

Causu thinks that parents do not have to spend money on their children in Europe, as the government takes care of that. Causu hopes that he will someday actually be able to visit Europe, because he likes everything about Europe, '*everything is there (...), money is there and civilization.*' Europe is believed to be a paradise, where all the opportunities are. This notion of Europe that is existent in Gambian society leads to migrants starting the journey of the backway 'misinformed and ill-prepared' (Schapendonk & van Moppes, 2007, p.2).

3.1.3. Seeing the backway as an experience, a necessity or seeing it as something Gambians are entitled to

The backway is mostly experienced by the interviewees as horrible and very tough, although hardly any of the Failed Returnees regrets taking the backway, as they gained life experience on the journey and came to know different people and cultures. Just like in Europe, many youths want to travel to gain life experience. The motivated Lamin (FR) partly decided to travel to Europe to make up for the fact that he did not finish his school in The Gambia, as he said:

'We also want to go there and experience there. Too much experience make you more perfect and you know much of the things. So without no travelling and no learning, no nothing. When you not learn, you have to travel to know something. If you know this, then you can pass that through.' (Lamin, 05-05-2017)

Travelling is for Lamin similar to following education. He explained that if he would have succeeded in making money in Europe, he would have built a factory in The Gambia, in order for other Gambians to profit as well.

Some Failed Returnees I interviewed were mentally not completely landed in The Gambia (yet). They are completely obsessed with going to Europe and they are very likely to try the backway again, once they see an opportunity to go. The impatient Mohammed's (FR) is one of them. His obsession was clear from the following statement:

'For me every day when I sleep, I will dream about Europe, every day, I will dream every day. I am not joking. Every day I dream about Europe. I mean it, I will go there, inshAllah, I will go there. I don't know, it will take time, but I will go there. Time don't reach, but if time reach I will go there. I always dream there about the place. The place is more better than Africa, isn't it?'

Not knowing what to reply exactly, I said:

'Yeah maybe.'

After which he said:

'Don't say maybe, don't say maybe (in a desperate tone).' (Mohammed, 01-05-2017)

Mohammed is strongly holding on to his dream of Europe and does not want anyone to crush that dream. For Mohammed it is a necessity that he tries the backway again.

Some individuals believe all Gambians are entitled to effortlessly migrate to Europe. Lamin Darboe, executive director of the National Youth Council, explained that this opinion was shared by the former president Jammeh. Darboe said:

'He (Jammeh) will tell Europeans, for four hundred years you have been migrating to Africa. Why is it that you don't allow our people to migrate to your country when you have plundered our economy? When you have stole from us. Now our people want to go to this individual stupendous.' (Lamin Darboe, 22-05-2017)

Aleou, a boy in secondary school, shares this opinion with Jammeh, as he said:

'we learn in the classes in the old days the missionaries (...) They were coming here (to The Gambia) for gold and diamonds and also colonialism, to discover new lands and now we are going also there (to Europe) in search for a better life. They (Europeans) came here and took our strong men and so on, so the same thing is happening now, we are going there to get something out of our grandparents. (...) Our poor, poor grandparents are the ones they take during the slavery to work in the plantations.' (Aleou, 31-05-2017)

Aleou tries to explain that it is not fair that Gambians are unwanted in Europe. They should be welcomed and given the opportunities to work in Europe, because Europe owes it to them, as Europeans have colonized Africa for decades and enslaved their ancestors.

3.1.4. Image of the European visa policy

'I have never think of visa, because I know I would not get it. Visa is my last hope,' (Abdoul K., 27-04-2017)

This is what the impatient Abdoul K. (FR) stated when talking about why he chose to take the irregular way to Europe. His believe that it is almost impossible to get a travel visa for Europe was shared among almost all the youth I have interviewed.

The process of getting a visa is time-consuming. To be eligible for a visa, the aspiring migrants have to show a bank statement with an account equalling thousands of euro's or they should be able

to prove that they have reliable contacts in Europe that will financially guarantee their stay. Additionally, several official documents are required (Cvajner and Sciortino 2010; Gaibazzi 2014). For most visa applications they have to travel to Dakar to do an interview about their travel intentions, as The Gambia only has an English and American embassy. These difficulties all contribute to making the threshold for visa application higher.

The visa application is seen by many Gambian youths as a gamble on an institution that they cannot control, while with irregular migration they have the feeling that to some extent they can control their chance of success. The seemingly desperate Causu (AM) also believes that it is easier for him to succeed in completing the backway than to acquire a travel visa, as he said:

'backway is just a struggle and then you are there'. (Causu, 19-04-2017)

Gambians could feel that it is quite random who gets a travel visa, as it is not explained why someone gets rejected and someone else not. This is also what the ambitious Causu D. (FR) experienced when he talked about why people take the irregular- instead of the regular way, as my translator translated:

'He said there are many people he joined the same journey with and they were having good papers, he believed those people should just have used the visa to travel but they were rejected in one way or the other and others also were discouraged by their friends who were rejected, that is why they used the backway instead of using the visa.' (Causu D., 18-06-2017)

The wise Omar (FAM) who has a diploma in development studies believes it is unfair that you cannot even get a visa if you want to study in Europe, as he said:

If I want to follow my study in Europe or Netherlands, the embassy rejects you for no reason, it happens. (...) You should give those who want to study access, you cannot compare Gambia University with Netherlands, if you want masters or PHD you have to get the chance to go apply visa, explore and come back, the condition attached to this is that those people take the backway, it is because of this visa'. (Omar, 19-04-2017)

The flighty Buba (FAM) believes it is only possible to get a visa for children and elderly people. These ideas that the visa is not attainable for youth get spread within the country and therefore many youths do not even try to apply, but they directly take the backway. This also applies to the depressed Abdoul C., as my translator translated:

'He would have loved to use the visa, but most of the people used to say, you use the visa, you apply and at the end of the day you end up failing and you don't get the money back. That is why he don't even try it and decided to use the backway, because there is no visa on that.' (Abdoul C., 07-06-2017)

Many interviewees complained that the application fee is not returned after you have been rejected for a visa. The ambitious Causu D. (FR) even argued that the visa policy is increasing economic inequality in The Gambia, as my translator translated him:

'He said it is like the poor are working and giving the money, applying for a visa, after failing, they (the government) will use that and improve their lives, while these people are failing everything.' (Causu D., 18-06-2017)

The idea that instead of the EU countries, their own government decides on the amount of visa's that are given out and how they are distributed, returned in several interviews. Similarly, the noble-minded Mousa (FR) explained:

'In The Gambia if people try visa, they will always reject you. (...) The government there, they only give visa to their workers to fly. For citizen that don't have jobs in the government, to have a visa is a big problem (...) Otherwise you are wasting your money with visa.' (Mousa, 05-05-2017)

When young people believe their own government are the ones behind the unfair visa policy, the image of the good Europeans is kept intact. However for Modou (FAM) this image does not exist. He describes the visa policy as discriminatory, as it is unfair that Europeans do not have to apply for a visa to come to The Gambia, while vice versa this is not the case. Bulli Dibba, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Interior Affairs, agrees with this statement and he called the visa policy discriminating. He does not believe that a policy of restriction will contribute to limiting the amount of people taking the backway. In his opinion it is a waste of money that the EU gives them patrolling cars to control their borders, as people will always find a way to migrate if they want to. According to Ibrahima Jammeh, deputy director at a secondary school, the strict visa requirements are contributing to irregular migration, as he said:

'Europeans are also contributing to this (the backway), because you may have all your requirement to go to Europe, you apply for visa and you're rejected. After everything you pay your visa fees, you take all the trouble getting papers. In the end you cannot get the visa. So now some of the visas will cost maybe 7000/6000. If I take 6000/5000 it will take me up to Libya, then let me start the journey. (...) the majority (of youth taking the backway) could be those from poor family. But equally, it is a cross the border because even if you are rich, your parents can pay school for you in England and everything and you apply for visa and you are rejected. These are really youth who want to go and they will find all possible means to go.' (Ibrahima Jammeh, 31-05-2017)

Similarly, Lamin Jammeh, data record assistant at the irregular migration unit, feels that the visa restriction triggers youths to take the backway.

On the other hand, Michael Hamadi Secka, teacher at the University of The Gambia and author of 'Horrors of the backway', was partially positive about the visa policy, as he said:

'you don't want to depopulate Africa so there is no point in allowing everyone to go, leaving Africa empty.' (Michael Hamadi Secka, 15-06-2017)

This should, however, not be a problem, as the population is growing exponentially in The Gambia. However, Hamadi Secka does believe that more youths should receive a visa, as he said:

'The international world has been talking about globalization, we must see the world as one village, as one family, so the international world too should try to increase the number of visas they offer to the youths.' (Michael Hamadi Secka, 15-06-2017)

Of everyone I interviewed, only Lamin Sainey, district board member of the Kombo East Development Alliance (KEYDA), agrees with the current visa policy, as he said:

'To me it is fine. It is not restricting anyone. You see how the world is going right now, you see the terror. If countries will not restrict peoples movements in their various destinations, otherwise lives would be at risk. To me it is a nice process that is okay.' (Lamin Sainey, 18-05-2017)

3.1.5. Misperceptions held intact by the visa

The paradise-like image of Europe exists despite the EU trying to do everything in its power to keep sub-Saharan migrants out. 'Despite' could be replaced with 'because of' in the sentence above, according to Lamin Darboe, executive director of the National Youth Council. He explained that because there is a low supply of travel visas for Europe, there is a high demand of people wanting to go to Europe. Darboe explained:

'visa has become a luxury, because it is a luxury, everyone (...) wants to be there (in Europe), so you can look special. (...) If going to Europe is only for the eligible few, the eldest or whatsoever, we all want to be in that class.' (Lamin Darboe, 22-05-2017)

Due to the strict visa policy Europe has become a forbidden fruit, which only makes the place more attractive. Darboe tried to prove his point, by saying:

'Before 1996 there was no visa between Gambia and UK. There was none. There was no issue of illegal migration. (...) I can tell you at that time, Gambians were very happy, they were happy people. With all their poverty. They have now more resources than then but they were happy. People don't want to go to England then, they go there and come back. They don't want to go (stay).' (Lamin Darboe, 22-05-2017)

Darboe argues that Europe would not be idealized as much if the visa policy was not as strict as it is. He argues that if it was less strict, less people would (permanently) migrate to Europe.

The attractive image of Europe remains in the minds of many elderly Gambians, as older generations, who profited enormously from migrating to Europe, display their wealth. These examples still inspire parents to send their children to migrate, however these same opportunities do not exist currently for them in Europe, at most only for a lucky few. Nevertheless, the hope in these opportunities encouraged Mama Gité, mother of an irregular migrant, to support her children in their dream to take the backway, as my translator translated for her:

'She is saying they feel proud of their children using the backway and crossing to Europe, but they are also happy with the Europeans that (...) welcome them and give them places where they can sleep and live at least to rest their minds to ensure there is peace in them and that there is a future for them. (...) But still they would like for more opportunities created for those people there to ensure that they give back

support to the families living back here, so other will not join them there.' (Mama Gité, 12-05-2017)

Mama Gite's holding on to the memory of better times in Europe for Gambian migrants, explains her incorrect reasoning of families sending more children through the backway if the Europeans do not create more opportunities for Gambians that are already in Europe. Mariama Bah, mother of an irregular migrant, also believes there are many opportunities for migrants in Europe, as the translator translated:

'What she likes about Europe is that there are several opportunities, on the education, employment and many others, but what she dislike there also is the involvement in drug abuse, if they are involved in criminal acts, like selling of drugs, she really don't like that.' (Mariama Bah, 07-06-2017)

For many irregular migrants it is often made impossible to work legally in Europe. Mariama Bah would, however, not easily believe that the lack of opportunities to work legally in Europe forces migrants to participate in criminal activities to make money to remit back home. She believes only migrants that were involved in criminal activities get deported and they are to be blamed themselves. Similar to Mariama, Kali Lucidibe, father of a migrant, believes there are a lot more opportunities for Gambians in Europe than in The Gambia, even though two of his sons are already in Europe and have still not been able to financially contribute more.

Ibrahima Jammeh, the deputy director of a secondary school, believes just like Lamin Darboe that there will be less misconceptions about Europe if more people get a travel visa and are able to experience Europe. He said:

"Me I went (to Europe) and came and now when I'm talking to them (potential migrants) I say: 'why going to Europe? I haven't seen anything that encourages me to stay. It is all about work and serious (...) Rather than going to Europe with that harsh weather, very cold sometimes minus 8, minus 10, minus 15 and you have to leave your house to go and work. So it is difficult.' But it is the perception actually, how they see it on the television and the media. That visa issue also needs to be addressed. (...) Allow them to go and explore. (...) If Europeans would allow all of us to go to see what is in Europe. Haha we will turn a new page, we will change our.. (perception), because I'm sure if they allow all Gambians. I'm not saying me and Ishmael alone. Once we see what exists, It is very difficult there, you see people running, going to job, it is all about time, it is all about stress you know." (Ibrahima Jammeh, 31-05-2017)

Lamin Darboe shares this view, as he said:

'if people can go and have the opportunity to see Europe for themselves and see people... I have been to America, I have been to Europe, people that I found, our brothers don't have life. They work from morning to evening. Some of them have two jobs, they don't have life. That is not living.' (Lamin Darboe, 22-05-2017)

The restrictions for Gambians to go to Europe are ever tightening, as the EU feels political pressure from its member states to be in control of migration. However, by increasing visa requirements and border surveillance, there are higher risks and costs of entry for Gambians, which makes it less likely

for them to depart after arrival. Increased border control in the Mexico-US migration system has also led to more undocumented crossing and longer stays of migrants (Vickstrom 2014), which can also be applied to Gambia-Europe migration. Darboe said:

'You will realize that if you go and you don't know when you will have the next opportunity, whether you will be allowed again, you would prefer to stay.' (Lamin Darboe, 22-05-2017)

Darboe believes that with maintaining a strict visa policy, the backway will remain popular for youth, as he said:

'Even if you close the Mediterranean, I can tell you another gate will open. Until we are able to solve the fundamental root causes, because someone in Europe will open another gate to smuggle people and earn a living from that. That is the nature of the world. (...) Even if you built the Trump wall, people will find a way to climb the wall or dig some hole under and come out at the other end.' (Lamin Darboe, 22-05-2017)

Imaginations of migrants are dynamic, therefore their migrant aspirations can change once confronted with reality (Schapendonk 2011). It is to be expected that these images of Europe would change when returning migrants tell about the real Europe, about that not everything is perfect, however, returnees often give false information about their lives in Europe or about the journey. They know people don't want to hear or believe the bad stories. Therefore, they remit biased information about 'the good life' to their family and friends (Schapendonk 2011, p.84). Lamin Sainey, district board member of KEYDA, explained the influence of this phenomenon as he said:

'Everyone have access to Facebook and if you go to Facebook you see some of these young guys that went to Italy or Germany or other countries and they post pictures, where sometimes even they just go somewhere to take a picture before houses, luxury cars other stuff. (...) even if it is not their stuff. Even in supermarkets. When we see that, we feel very much impressive on this conducive lifestyle. Even though some sleep in cartons or in stores. But what we see is what we try to analyze. Those are factors that make youth to be inquisitive what Europe is all about.' (Lamin Sainey, 18-05-2017)

Author of the book 'horrors of the backway', Michael Hamadi, explains that migrants that return to The Gambia for holidays, consciously 'put on flashy dresses' to impress their families and friends. Returnees are often afraid to get less respected by the community when they say that Europe or the journey is not as good as anyone thinks. Some of the failed returnees also told me that it has sometimes no use telling that the backway is actually awful, as it is difficult to change the mind of someone who wants to go, because they want to experience it for themselves.

Mariama, who is in secondary school and is the sister of a migrant, explained that not only migrants themselves keep the idealized image of Europe intact, but also their families, as she said:

'Even in this school if you see someone who buy a second hand cloth and if I ask this one is nice where did you buy from and they say my brother in Europe sent it to me, while it was bought from the market here'. (Mariama, 31-05-2017)

Mariama believes that people tell these little lies, because they are proud of their brothers who took the backway. However, maybe the migrant is in reality not able to send much money and products home, but the family wants to keep his and their high reputation by lying about it.

This process of keeping the imaginaries intact is called cumulative causation and it results in a never-ending migration system (Castles, De Haas, Miller 2014).

3.2. Image of Africa and The Gambia

As we have seen, the ambitious Causu D. explained that his community experienced Libya as a similar place to Europe. This view is, however, not shared by most failed returnees. The seemingly depressed Salifo (FR) said:

'Europe is better than here, Africa. (...) Africa and Arabic country and Italy difference is there. When you reach to Libya here, they disturbing (discriminating) black people there, they kill black people. No mercy, deliberately. So Europe, Italy this kind of disturbing is not there, they respect human being. (...)The Arabic are not good.'
(Salifo, 18-06-2017)

Multiple times various Failed Returnees expressed their outrage over the discrimination and wickedness of Arabic people. The overthrow of the Libyan dictator Gaddafi in 2011 and the subsequent civil war, which continues up to this day, has seen the country's law enforcement to malfunction and the government in Tripoli to lose legitimacy among its citizens (Camara and Hunt 2018). This makes it easy for Libyans to take advantage of the sub-Saharan migrants. Because Salifo views Libya as bad, he experiences the whole of Africa as bad. Salifo balances Africa including the Arabic countries against Europe and he states Europe is better, because there is less discrimination, even though he has never been in Europe. The more racist Europeans will probably not visit The Gambia. Therefore, Salifo's image of a welcoming, tolerant Europe might be crooked.

In general many interviewed youths seemed to look down on Africans. This discrimination against themselves might be a heritage from the colonial period. This lack of self-worth could result in youths believing that they cannot accomplish anything (in The Gambia) and because they have the image that all Europeans are welcoming and that money is more easily acquirable in Europe, the comparison might inspire migrant aspirations.

Below, I will explain factors contributing to the imaginary that Europeans are better than Africans and I will elaborate on how the feeling of a low local self-worth arises. I will also elaborate on how the backway can reinforce pride in The Gambia.

3.2.1. The Gambia vs. Europe and The Gambia vs. Africa

Different factors in Gambian society contribute to only lifting up Western achievements on for instance economic and cultural aspects instead of Gambian achievements. In daily life, Gambian youths are continuously confronted with these Western achievements which creates a lack of local self-worth.

The central place in society for Western economic achievements was discussed by Raimund Moser, a Swiss national who works for the International Trade Centre and who is the program manager of the EU's *Youth Empowerment Project* in The Gambia, by saying:

'Here (in The Gambia) we have an issue of everything is imported, maybe with the exception of the peanuts and the water which is manufactured here, but the moment you order anything from the mayonnaise to the bread and the meat, all the decoration here, it is all coming from abroad. Even the toothpicks I bought are imported, so there also it is important to produce more locally and create a sense of pride with The Gambians, that they are proud of their own production. Because currently there is a feeling that everything that comes from abroad is better and that I think also adds to the backway syndrome.' (Raimund Moser, 16-06-2017)

Mohammed (FR) who is a great admirer of Europe, confirmed the feeling of a lack of pride in The Gambian economy and production, as he disappointedly stated:

'Gambia company is here, but important company, less than 5 are here.'
(Mohammed, 01-05-2017)

For young people, it is important to have a sense of pride for their country for them to want to stay and invest in their country. This feeling of pride could be developed if they would experience The Gambia as an important country in the global market, that can create an environment where major companies can grow and be successful. This would give youths hope that their people are capable of creating success in their own country. Currently there is a lack of these economic achievements.

Additionally, there is also a general feeling that there are not many cultural achievements in The Gambia, as the media are focussing a lot on Western cultural achievements. Nyamnjoh and Page (2002) explained that 'Africans are bombarded with mass-mediated accounts of the glory of Western cultural achievements and the local sense of self-worth is eroded on a daily bases' (p.631). This statement also applies to The Gambia, as Raimund Moser said:

'Because you (Gambian youths) want to leave, because here you don't see any opportunities, you don't have any role models, or any champions, you don't have anything to look up to.(...) If you asked a young man or woman here in The Gambia, what are the people they look up to, they would say Akon or 50 Cent or whoever it is someone from elsewhere.' (Raimund Moser, 16-06-2017)

Young people perceive that there are not many local heroes to look up to, and although there are many talented Gambian artists, they are generally overshadowed by Western artists.

The interviewees did nevertheless express positive images of The Gambia, most of which were related to the change of government. These specific images are explained more elaborately in the next chapter. The down-hearted Dodou (FR) explained that he knew what The Gambia meant to him, the moment he returned after experiencing the backway, by saying:

'By the time I step in Gambia I thank God, because of all the pain and suffering I get outside. (...) The day I reach in The Gambia I sleep comfortable, every day good bath, good eat.' (Dodou, 05-05-2017)

Experiencing hardship of the backway made Dodou appreciate what he had before.

In addition, when the failed returnees were comparing The Gambia to other African countries, instead of Europe, they did seem more proud of The Gambia. The down-hearted Salifo

(FR) and the ambitious Causu D. (FR) both described Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso as 'wicked' and they said that The Gambia is better than those countries. Causu explained in bragging way:

'So many people in Libya, they say The Gambia is just like Europe.' (Causu D., 18-06-2017)

Also the impatient Abdoul K. (FR) is more proud of The Gambia since he took the backway, as he said:

'Gambia is a peaceful country, because I went to Senegal and Mauritania but the people are not the same (...) interacting with the people in The Gambia is very easy. It is very different in Senegal certain parts, but especially in Mauritania, you have a lot of racism.' (Abdoul K., 27-04-2017)

Similarly, the naïve Sainey (FR) learned to appreciate The Gambia by experiencing difficulties in other African countries, as he said:

'There is many thing in The Gambia and when you are going in this world, without money you can nothing. In The Gambia if you (...) no money, you can survive. People will call you kunkulange, kunkudina.' (Sainey, 05-04-2017)

On the backway these men have been exposed to exploitation in other countries, which made them realize that The Gambia is not so bad in comparison to those countries, as Gambians often help each other in times of need.

All the interviewed Aspiring Migrants have the intention to return to The Gambia if they have worked in Europe for a while. The reason why most youths want to return was explained by the noble minded Mousa (FR), as he said:

'Yes, Yes, Yes!! Gambia is our homeland. I will not leave my country to stay somewhere else like that because all my family is in The Gambia. My friends, my uncles all are in The Gambia.' (Mousa, 05-05-2017)

3.2.2. Place-bound poverty in The Gambia

'To them (aspiring migrants) Europe is the only best place. It is the only place they can make a living, because they think this place (The Gambia) is backward. (...) What we see of Africa in the media is wars, farming and other stuff. It doesn't portray intelligent and smart people doing their best. It doesn't portray hope, it portrays hopelessness. So that shaped our notion over time. Where do you want to be to ensure that you live in that decent life?' (Lamin Darboe, 22-05-2017)

This statement was made by Lamin Darboe, executive director of the National Youth Council. It indicates the lack of pride some young people have in The Gambia. This lack of pride could make it easier for young people to leave and take the backway. This is also the reason that Modou, a boy in secondary school who's brother already took the backway, once tried the journey himself. He said:

'I'm sorry to say but black society is very difficult to survive in it. In a family you can see someone who is wealthy in terms of wealth but that individual would only consider himself and forget ones from the same family and if you ask for it they will say look for it like I also looked for it.' (Modou, 31-05-2017)

Modou implies with his statement that a wealthy European, in contrast to a Gambian, is not selfish and would share everything with his family. Many Gambian youths link poverty to a place, which is The Gambia and therefore they feel like their only way out of poverty is to migrate. The down-hearted Abdoul C. (FR) believes that God decides which countries will be rich, as the translator translated:

'He said that poverty is a thing that God decides on anyone. He feels like looking at Europe, the lifestyle there is one key thing that he likes. There is healthy life there compared to Africa there is healthy life in Europe and the economy also is better than here. (...) This is what he loves about Europe.' (Aboul C., 07-06-2017)

Many of the interviewed youths expressed feelings that they could potentially be successful, although, this could not be realized in The Gambia. Poverty and unemployment in The Gambia were named as the main reasons why most of the youths are/were interested in taking the backway. Even though there is visible wealth displayed in some places in The Gambia, the youths still see their country as a place of poverty, where wealth is coming from outside. The down talking of The Gambia starts already at a young age. When I spoke to children from a primary school, who were between the ages of thirteen and fifteen, a boy said about The Gambia that the place is *'not nice'*, that he does not like *'anything'* here, because *'the place is not developed'*. Another boy said that he does not like the poverty and another child explained that *'getting money in The Gambia is not easy'*.

Many young people I talked to believe that it is difficult to have a business in The Gambia. This believe probably derives from many youths having a lack of knowledge about how to sustain a business. Moreover, this feeling is enhanced by the policies of the former regime. For example, when talking to young entrepreneurs at Kotu Beach, they explained that in that time they felt they were not able to control the success of their businesses, as taxes could be raised at any moment or the regime could take over or close your business if it was in their profit.

Most of young interviewees think of themselves as poor. This also applies to the down-hearted Ibrahima (FR), who kept repeating that *'it's not easy'* in The Gambia, because *'people sit here straight from morning up to night, we have nothing'*. On the other hand, he was very positive about Europe, as he said:

'Europe is nice. (...) It is a blessed country, so it is not like Africa.' (Ibrahima, 24-06-2017)

The impatient Mohammed (FR) also loves Europe, because Europe is more *'blessed'* than Africa, according to him. About Africa he stated:

'African people, it is all suffering, me you see this small house, haha (ironically) my property is like that.' (Mohammed, 01-05-2017)

Mohammed believes African people are poor, because they are Africans that live in Africa. He thinks having success in life is dependent on the environment you are in, as he said:

'You know African and European they are not the same, even environment, even air, they are not the same. (...) You know Africa, they have resource, but Europe has more resource than Africa, only river, plus port, plus fishing. Africa is like that, maybe fifteen country in Africa they are poor country, so Europe they have plenty resource.'

When you have children and the mom don't have power, you can take the children put them in a place and when they are 5 years you can get them, but Africa not here, because the majority is poor. Of this country if you have 100 percent 75 percent is poor, only 40 percent is having something. Africa and Europe are not the same. The father (in Europe) open account but Africa there is no resource.' (Mohammed, 01-05-2017)

A lot of poor families in The Gambia have many children. These children are supposed to assist their parents at a certain age, however the first five years of the child's life, they are not able to help in the household or with small chores and they are only costing the family money. Mohammed has the imaginary that because Europe is wealthier poor European mothers just take their babies to an orphanage and pick them up after five years. In reality European families focus more on consciously planning the expansion of their families. The families in Europe are usually smaller than in The Gambia, where religion, societal pressures and the lack of knowledge about birth control still play a big role in the family expansions. Mohammed believes that the availability of natural resources determine that the major part of Africa is poor and whether a father is able to save money, while this is rather determined by a variety of social, cultural, political and economic factors.

A motive for taking the backway that kept returning in the interviews was that people were not able to save money in The Gambia. The depressed Abdoul C. (FR) felt useless living in The Gambia before he left for Europe, as he said:

'Three years I had been working without saving 20.000, means I was doing nothing'. (Abdoul C., 07-06-2017)

The reason interviewees often gave for not being able to save was that their earning went *'from hand to mouth'* (all is spent on food). The flighty Buba (FAM) believes the government can reduce the amount of youth taking the backway if they provide for more jobs, higher salaries and if they controlled the market prices more. He claims this would help people to save and invest their money. About controlling the market prices, he stated:

'so that people can spent their money wisely and they still have their money with them and they are spending it good'. (Buba, 26-04-2017)

However, Buba disregards that the mentality of being bad at saving money derives from a long history of poverty. As soon as people have money they immediately spend it, instead of saving it. When someone in the family earns money, they are expected to share what they have with the family and of course the family members that did not earn the money themselves will find it very easy to spend it all at once. The family is used to a somewhat fixed amount of money. However, if the bread winner will start to earn more, soon people in his social network will know and more people will ask for financial support. Modou, the brother of my colleague Serreh at YepAfrica, told me that at first when he got a good job, he tried to keep his earning level a secret and he tried to appear less wealthy by purposely not wearing suits, because as soon as his community finds out he is earning a large amount they start asking for money for all the things they need to buy.

In short, a change in perception on The Gambia and on Gambian societal customs is needed even more than an increase in salaries for people to be able to save money and start seeing The Gambia as a place of possibilities rather than solely a place of poverty.

3.2.3. Corruption and connections

In countries with high levels of corruption like The Gambia, money often stands above the law, which makes it more powerful, because then money can 'buy' you a better life. For instance Modou, the brother of my colleague, explained that now you can see he is wealthy by his appearance (driving nice cars and wearing suits), the police hardly stops him at checkpoints and he does not have to show his passport, as the police officers are afraid that their boss is a friend of his and therefore he would have the power to get them fired. Because of the power of money relative deprivation within communities instigates more jealousy than usually.

Being rich leads to a higher social status, however, many young Gambians experience difficulties with getting a job in The Gambia. This also applies to the highly educated youngster. The impatient Abdoul K. (FR) explained this issue, as follows:

'Here (in The Gambia) are certain places where you go with your certificate and you will not be employed, not because of your certificate but because you are not connected to that person. Like if I was a director and my friend came, I will take my friend because I know him. It is not what you know, it is who you know. This is the problem.' (Abdoul K., 27-04-2017)

A large network, thus help with getting a job. This is, however, frustrating for youths that have had a good education, but see that under qualified people fulfil their jobs, as they sometimes have more social connections than them. A taxi driver called Nfamarra explained that it does not matter how high your grades are on your degree, because the person with the connections will always get the job.

Youths take the backway, because they believe migrating irregularly leads to earning money quickly. Visa is often not an option, as it may take months to run through the institutional procedures of obtaining a European visa (Schapendonk 2011, p. 192). Additionally, some youths believe it is only possible to get a visa if you have contacts at the embassy, or if you have the financial power to bribe. This also applies to the seemingly hopeless Saidu B. (AM). He did therefore not even consider applying for visa, because for a guy without friends at the embassy, applying for visa is *'just a matter of losing money'*.

3.3. Concluding remarks

In this chapter I tried to explain what kind of images exists in Gambian society of Europe and The Gambia, how these images are created and how they influence migrant aspirations among youths.

It shows how specific geographical qualities attached to places can impact the decision-making regarding migration. Aspiring migrants expect that there are more life opportunities for them in Europe than in The Gambia. They believe money is more easily acquirable in Europe, therefore migrating there can give them socio-economic success quickly and then they can skip the phase of effort and learning (Ludl 2008). Additionally, some youths have the idea that the money made after taking the backway is appreciated more by the community than the wages they earn in The Gambia. Geographical imaginations reflect thus not only youths' imaginations of how life may be different elsewhere but also how life is now. Gambian youths sometimes also believe that Europeans will provide them with all that they need or that education is easier accessible in Europe. The lack of jobs in The Gambia cause these youths not to be able to attain the attributes of adulthood in Gambian society and therefore many of them develop these believes in spaces of waithood where they

reinvent their identities through popular Western mass culture. The ideas about Europe are therefore influenced by media, cultural values and youth's general life aspirations and vice versa. The individually experienced images can collectively become socio-culturally constructed imaginaries that can inspire migrant aspirations (O'Reilly 2014). Someone's personal context determines the images he or she is exposed to. When someone's imaginaries change under influence of for instance gossip, his or her migrant aspirations can also change. Consequently, the imaginaries can cause someone to take the backway misinformed and ill-prepared. However they also might partially want to take the backway for the experience of the journey, they might reason that these experiences are part of their education process or they are determined to conquer the difficulties on the way. Additionally, many youths do not try to go to Europe through the regular way, as they believe it is impossible for young people to meet all the visa requirements. Some also believe that their own government is in charge of the visa policy, which keeps their image of the perfect Europe intact. Because of the strict visa policy, obtaining a visa has become a luxury for the happy few, which only inspires more fantasies about Europe. Possibly, these fantasies could be put in better perspective if more Gambians were allowed to go and return, as all the interviewed youths expressed having the intention to return to The Gambia, however because it is such a struggle to reach Europe, they are triggered to stay indefinitely.

The memory of the achievements of former Gambian generations in Europe also still inspires migrant aspirations. Seeing Europeans living in The Gambia working at NGOs and seeing the European tourists that are able to spend large amounts of money (the currency is to their advantage) confirms the image aspiring migrants have of prosperity and kindness in Europe. Returnees have been confronted with the reality of Europe, but they do not deconstruct the paradise images, as they fear to lose their gained respect or they resign to deconstruct the images as they think people have to see it with their own eyes to believe it. All the failed returnees I interviewed experienced Libya as a wicked place, therefore some view the whole of Africa as a bad place to be. However, others appreciate their own country more, since they experienced the hardship in other countries on the backway. In daily life, Gambians are often confronted with economic and cultural achievements of the West, which makes young people discouraged about the possibilities and the future they have in The Gambia. Many youths believe in place-bound poverty in The Gambia and they think the place is not blessed like Europe, however the way in which money is distributed in the family makes it clear why they are not able to save some of the income. Lastly, the corruption in the country gives youth a feeling that not everyone has equal chances to success in The Gambia. In contrast to explaining migration through cost-benefit analyses, deconstructing imaginaries does not only contribute to explain why people aspire to migrate, but also where people desire to migrate and why some people do not desire to migrate.

Chapter 4: Policy measures influencing migrant aspirations

The countries of the EU fear being stormed by irregular migrants from Africa, which has caused the EU to implement policy outside of its borders, in African countries. For The Gambia and other African countries the EU designed a 'one size fits all'-policy focused on getting more economic development in the hope of keeping potential migrants in their countries. The new democratic government in The Gambia cooperates happily with implementing EU designed policy, as it means investment in their country. The previous two chapters explained that economic factors alone do not shape and create migrant aspirations. This chapter discusses to what extent (economic) policy can influence migrant aspirations. The question I will try answer in this chapter is: How do current policy measures influence the decision to migrate, and to what extent is local empowerment a suitable policy solution?

Firstly, I will elaborate on how Gambian youths perceive the policy on irregular migration of the former government and I will compare this with their perceptions on the new government and their policies. Accordingly, I will argue that the (new) policies do not completely connect to the way migrant aspirations are shaped through Gambian society. By doing so, I will also explain how the European visa policy is rather enabling youths to migrate irregularly than restricting them. Secondly, I will explain the discrepancies between the EU funded YEP project to deter youths from taking the backway and how migrant aspirations actually function. Additionally, I will argue that it depends on the person what kind of migrant aspirations he has and how they can fluctuate. Therefore improving the economy in the country will not reduce the migrant aspirations of all youths. Lastly, I will discuss to what extent different forms of empowerment can stimulate potential irregular migrants to stay in The Gambia.

4.1. Perception on the former government's policy towards irregular migration

Taibou Sonko, the deputy director of the Ministry Youth and Sport, explained to me that The Gambia did not have a central policy on migration under the former regime of president Yahya Jammeh (22 July 1994 – 21 January 2017). This could have had something to do with the fact that he was fickle in his statements on migration, according to Lamin Darboe, executive director of the National Youth Council. Darboe explained:

'Jammeh doesn't have any permanent position in migration. When he is addressing Gambians, he is discouraging migration. But when he is talking to Europeans he cannot discourage it. (...) In the UN office address he said he was going to sue EU at The Hague for killing our people in the Mediterranean. That EU is responsible for the deaths in the Mediterranean. So when he (Jammeh) is in the field in Gambia talking to parents, he will tell parents and young people (...), that they should not migrate and stay here.(...) He is very unpredictable. (...) If you see someone that is both for and against, where do you classify him, that becomes a difficult thing'. (Lamin Darboe, 22-05-2017)

According to Caroline Crawford from the IOM, there was a spike in the trend of youths taking the backway around five or six years ago when Jammeh was in power, because he informed all Gambians with the message that if they were not satisfied in The Gambia, they should just leave. However, based on Jammeh's egocentricity and proneness to paranoia, as described by several interviewees,

he possibly had said something like that in anger, because his pride could have been damaged when he noticed many young people did not want to be in The Gambia anymore. He could have been jealous that Gambians would rather be in Europe than in The Gambia. Moreover, Ibrahima (FR) was convinced that Jammeh was firmly against irregular migration, as he said:

'He (Jammeh) don't like people go in backway. He tell police in other country to charge more for Gambians.' (Ibrahima, 24-06-2017)

Nevertheless, Jammeh was not able to restrain all youth from taking the backway and therefore he started blaming the EU for the fact that Gambians embarked on the journey and died at the sea.

The autocratic governance and political oppression of president Jammeh might have increased migration aspirations among youths. According to Bulli Dibba, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Interior, many youths took the backway under the regime of Jammeh, because there was a lot of discrimination in The Gambia. Dibba explained that only people of certain tribes could secure employment at that time.

Under Jammeh's governance a project was executed aimed at reducing farmers from taking the backway, which was called 'Operation No Back Way to Europe', funded by the European Commission. The project gave farmers some tools to generate higher profits, although it was mainly focused on making them aware of the dangers of the backway (The Guardian 2012). The former government's approach regarding irregular migration was not effective, according to Taibou Sonko. He explained that they only focused on sensitization of young people (scaring them of the dangers of the backway), although demanding youths to stay, without offering any opportunities in The Gambia, has no use. Michael Hamadi Secka, author of 'Horrors of the backway' and teacher at the University of The Gambia, agrees with this statement, as he said:

'The former regime was not using persuasive means, it was trying to dictate the youth, don't go, no to backway.' (Michael Hamadi Secka, 15-06-2017)

However, for Mariama, a girl in secondary school who is the sister of an irregular migrant, sensitization did help her, as she explained:

'Even me, I used to say, I want to take the backway, but due to sensitization I changed my mind. (...) Government has to educate our people. We are moving out, because my brothers are moving out and they are part of me.' (Mariama, 31-05-2017)

She believes that the government as an authority can convince people that taking the backway is a bad idea. However telling people what to do only works if people have trust in the institution, which was not the case for the majority of Gambians living under the autocratic regime of Jammeh.

4.2. Perception on the (new) government

Michael Hamadi Secka explained his view on the new government and their policy towards irregular migration, as he said:

'The present government is too early to say. They are just about six month old in power. They tend to be more relax and tend to be more free. They tend to be more inviting donors to see how best the youth can be catered for. (...) they have the intention to reduce the number of people that go through the backway. They have the

intention by creating enough jobs, looking at the school curriculum, affiliating with other organisations, like the Spanish and other countries that have donated for youth activities.’ (Michael Hamadi Secka, 15-06-2017)

Even though the new government wishes to limit irregular migration, the opposite is happening at the moment, according to Hamadi Secka, as he said:

‘To be very frank, people are more eager to travel now than it used to be. It is not an issue of political reasons why the youths were going. Most of the youth are not political decedents. They were not much interested in politics. Most of them were ejected out of the school system. The statistics I carried out, 45 % of the youth who travelled are school dropouts, people who drop from the schools system. People that had no faith in their potentials.’ (Michael Hamadi Secka, 15-06-2017)

He suggests that youths do not think they can rely on a government for opportunities. He believes that currently even more youths do not think they can achieve something with their capabilities in The Gambia and that these young people think taking the backway is the only solution to their problems. Hamadi Secka does not believe that the hope in the new government alone can keep youths from taking the backway. Lamin Ceesay, programme officer of YepAfrica, agrees with this to some extent, as he said:

‘One thing people are talking about now, the new Gambia. We all hope things will change in near future but those changes are not yet realistic, they are not yet visible. You cannot take that as an assurance that, that has (will) drastically reduced the interest of many people.’ (Lamin Ceesay, 18-05-2017)

To Taibou Sonko, the deputy director of the Ministry Youth and Sport, it is no surprise that the aim of the new government to limit irregular migration is not yet visible in the daily lives of Gambians, as the Ministry of Interior Affairs first has to develop a central policy on migration. Lamin Jammeh, a data record assistant, also explained that their jobs at the irregular migration unit have not changed much after the transition of government, their mandate currently remains unchanged. The only new thing in their jobs is that they have to receive more deportees at the airport, as the new government has made deals with the EU and the IOM to take these Gambian migrants back. The last couple of months of 2017 a project has been launched aimed at re-integration of deportees. The European Emergency Trust Fund made 3.9 million euro’s available for this project (IOM 2017). Lamin Jammeh made a statement relating to the trend Hamadi Secka has noticed, when he said that last year they intercepted more minors than ever that were on their way to Libya. He explained that the number of people taking the backway has increased recently, as ten years back almost nobody from the region Kombo-East, coastal urban area, would use the backway and now that has changed. However, Bulli Dibba, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Interior, believes the new government will limit this trend. He argued that less people will migrate, as the new government will create an environment where people are free to pursue happiness and economic gains. Nevertheless, they expect to create this by having a free market without a social security system, which would not allow all Gambians to benefit from this new environment. Currently, families are forced to function as social security systems, although the interviewed youths all indicated that they believe the government should contribute in taking care of the sick-, old- and disabled people. The ambitious Causu D. (FR) explained about this issue:

'The awareness of the people in that aspect is also lacking, that is why people are taking this responsibility (to take care of these people), but it should be the job of the government to do that. That will ease the responsibility of the people at work.' (Causu D., 18-06-2017)

Currently, because of the lack of a government organized social security system, many Gambian families try to spread family income risks by sending a family member to Europe, as the impatient Abdoul K. (FR) explained:

'the (new) government has to prove their rules, because (...) every year people are travelling, (...) they are not happy with the salary, they are not happy with the payment and it is very hard to live in The Gambia here, the salary is not satisfied, okay maybe by now the government changes, (...) but by then it was very hard, prices were very expensive, so I find it hard to live here. (...) you must have someone in Europe, helping with you with some, keep the family going.' (Abdoul K., 27-04-2017)

Nevertheless, Sonko agrees with Bulli Dibba that more young people will stay in The Gambia, because the new government is investing in agriculture, skill training and the creation of employment, while the former government was only investing in individual people. The selective investment in the country of former president Jammeh was visible in the landscape. Jammeh has constructed an expressway for the village he was born in, while the whole country hardly has any asphalt roads. However, this selective investment was not one of the things that necessarily made people dislike Jammeh. The people I asked about it, seemed to respect this about him, as every individual in Gambian society is expected to first help the people in their own communities, when they get rich. According to my friend Beres, Jammeh played people from different tribes against each other. He used *'ignorant people'* to gain power for himself, however Beres believes that now *'it will get okay'*, as the new government focuses on reconciliation between all tribes. When I spoke to Beres on the phone in March 2018, he told me he experiences that there are more development projects in the country, however because the coalition has *'too many parties'*, he is afraid it slows down the decision making processes, he stated:

'The system is becoming low (slow).' (Beres, 22-03-2018)

Although there is more trust in this government, Gambian people are not used to having a democratic political climate with a coalition of parties. The new government still has to win over the people and gain in legitimacy, as Gambians might feel the (former) government has not ruled to serve the people, but only to enhance its own gains. The desperate Saidu B. (AM) does not trust governments in general, as he experienced that you can only *'rely on yourself'*. He has this believe, because of the many problems he had with a lack of workers protection in the past, which made him feel fed up with his country. Aleou, a boy in secondary school who has a brother that took the backway, does not believe that the new government will succeed in limiting irregular migration, because if they would have the power to do so, change would already have been visible, as he said:

'I don't think the backway can be stopped right now (...)the new government during the campaign, I heard that if they come into power they would reduce most of the price of the commodities and also they would increase salaries, but now most people are discouraged about the new government to my observation.' (Aleou, 31-05-2017)

Similarly, at the beginning of 1994, after the coup d'état, Jammeh also gave youths hope that the country would change for the better, however with the continuation of economic hardship this hope soon vanished (Ceesay, 2016). The downhearted Dodou (FR) is sceptical towards the new government, as he said:

'(I have a) little bit hope, but not too much, but I can wait maybe if there is no change in one year still the same problems, I will try backway again to look for a better life.'
(Dodou, 05-05-2017)

On the other hand, I also spoke to youths who claim that the hope in the new government has changed their lives and their migrant aspirations. An example is the insecure and noble-minded Mousa (FR). He had a hard time on the journey of the backway and he claims that, because he heard about the new president in The Gambia, he decided to come back. It is also possible that he uses the transition of government as an excuse to justify to his friends and family giving up on the journey, without having to admit that the journey was just too hard for him. Accordingly, he can explain his family that his coming back is more profitable than going to Europe, as the new government will bring opportunities, by which he can assist them better. Mousa said he is hopeful for the future. Similarly, the flighty Buba (FAM) might be using the transition of government as an excuse to his family not to embark on the journey. Before he was being pressured by his family to take the backway in order for him to become able to support them financially. However, now with the hope that the new government will create employment for youth, he changed his mind about taking the backway. Additionally, he hopes that with this political transition, the visa requirements will become more lenient. The believe that the government is in control over the amount of visa's that are distributed, instead of the EU countries, is shared amongst more interviewed youth. Mohammed's (FR) faith in the new government also makes him believe that they will make acquiring travel visa's easier. Mohammed had some contradictory statements on his desire to take the backway again, since he claimed in the beginning of the interview that he would embark on the journey again as soon as he had enough money (as he believes it would be easier this time, because he knows the route very well), while at the end of the interview when he was talking about his faith in the new government, he stated:

'No not the backway, maybe I will try through flight, through visa, change can come every time.' (Mohammed, 01-05-2017)

His contradictory statements are also indicating that as soon as his faith in change is not met by the new government, he would try the backway again. According to Lamin Sainey, board member of KEYDA, for this change to be visible it could take a long time, as he stated:

'it is never easy to make such a transformation coming from the regime that we have come from today. But I am very optimistic. Some of those promises from the campaign will come to reality. It is not going to be simple but it will be a process. This is a government that have inherit nothing from the past government. There was no transition between the past and the present government and that will affect some of the intention. (...) Partner with EU, as time unfolds there will be a lot of sustainable development that some of these young people can venture in and be self-reliant, to make their dreams into reality.' (Lamin Sainey, 18-05-2017)

Michael Hamadi Secka thinks that for the promises of the new government to become reality, they would first have to put more focus on youth, as he said:

'For the backway to be stopped, first and foremost the government should be very sensitive of youths. Youth are the cream of the society, so they should change their budget. It has some budget constraints. Rather than spending much on ammunition and other issues, youths should be number one priority. To make sure that at least they create jobs for youths on yearly basis. Apart from creating jobs let them make sure that they create wideband markets, that targets the talents of the youth.'
(Michael Hamadi Secka, 15-06-2017)

Lamin Sainey agrees with Hamadi Secka, although he only believes irregular migration can be limited if the new government provides opportunities for youths to become self-reliant, as he said:

The state also has to employ people (...) when it comes to youth empowerment processing. Young people must be seen as the cream of society. (...) Look at the national youth council. The budget allocated for them is zero point something for budget. How do you expect for that money to be wisely used to develop young people of this country to realize their dreams. (...) However it is difficult to say to people stop irregular migration, what do you have for them?. The available opportunities have to be created in The Gambia. Engage them to be self reliant. (...) youth have to depend on their own and they stop irregular migration. Train young people who train other young people and share the stories of irregular migration in the communities.' (Lamin Sainey, 18-05-2017)

However, to get youth to become self-reliant does not only depend on more employment but also on the school system, according to Sainey, as he said:

'you should start learning skills at a very young age, before you grow you will have the interest. Your mindset is built on that. The curriculum is sometimes not doing much favour for people, because the mindset has already took something different.'
(Lamin Sainey, 18-05-2017)

Sainey, possibly hints on the fact that many children develop migrant aspirations at a young age, as they are confronted with the possible gains of migration in daily life.

Many Gambian youths have hope in the creation of economic opportunities in The Gambia with the transition of government, which can possibly withhold them (temporarily) from migrating irregularly. Another factor with the same effect can be the faith in a democracy, as for some youth the aspiration to migrate might have been partly formed by their abomination of the autocratic regime. Schapendonk (2011) argues that there is a political dimension to economic migration from the global South (p. 19). According to De Haas (2010), people who live under an authoritarian regime wish more often to migrate somewhere else. On the other hand, under the autocratic regime Gambian migrants also might have used the argument that The Gambia was an autocracy to get a permit to stay in Europe. For many Gambians getting a legal permit to stay in Europe has become more difficult since The Gambia is a democracy. However, this has not been a reason (yet) for my interviewees to develop a more negative sentiment about the democracy. The impatient

Mohammed (FR) has a more positive perception on The Gambia now that there is a democracy, as he said:

'Gambia will be better, first no democracy but now democracy is there. Democracy has advantages and disadvantages. First if you see thing you don't like, you cannot say it, but now if you see bad thing, you can say it anyhow, just mind your word, because of democracy, so maybe later Gambia will be better.' (Mohammed, 01-05-2017)

Lamin Darboe, executive director of the National Youth Council, explained that, because the new government is introducing a Western democracy in The Gambia, there is a lot of pressure on them and much depends on their success or failure, when he said:

'If this government fails, it means that Western democracy has failed in The Gambia. And it means because we constantly weigh 22 years of dictatorship under Jammeh against what Barrow can do in five years. If it fail, you will have people that will say we are better off with an dictatorship than Western democracy. That is why Barrow, the current government is a global challenge to see democracy win over dictatorship. We are hoping and we hope our hopes will be realized.' (Lamin Darboe, 22-05-2017)

Many Gambians have high expectations of the new democracy, however because the dictatorship is gone, the capacity to repress the expectations is gone as well and the capacity of the new government to satisfy the expectations has not proven yet and is also a difficult task (as the transition did not go smoothly and by looking at the lack of infrastructure in the country). There is a risk that if people's expectations of the new government are not realized within a year or so, they might migrate irregularly after all, trying to satisfy their expectations. An increase in political freedom often goes hand in hand with higher emigration rates (Castles 2010; Flahaux and De Haas 2016). Mariama, a girl in secondary school whose brother took the backway, is also not sure if the transition to a democracy will deter youths from taking the backway, as she said:

'Gambia is now democratic republic but still people are killing each other and say yeah it is a democratic republic, so people can also embark on the journey and say we can do anything we feel like, because we are a democratic republic. They don't know what democracy is, so it may even make them to embark on the journey. I own myself, I own my money and I can use it anyhow I like, I can go on backway journey.' (Mariama, 31-05-2017)

Mariama thinks the notion of a democracy is misinterpreted by many Gambians in such a way that many Gambians feel like there are no rules or laws and everyone is free to do as they like. On the contrary she experienced that when the transitioning of government was happening many youths were against the backway, however, she also said:

'now I'm not hearing people going on backway journey but I know for sure people will not stop. The aim is still there, just not the resources. But when the resources are available people will embark on the journey.' (Mariama, 31-05-2017)

In this statement Mariama actually explains that if the new government brings development and jobs, more people will take the backway, as the aim to go to Europe has not been changed.

Box 4: The Power of Hope

Migrant aspirations can be influenced and shaped by hope. Some people that initially wanted to migrate to Europe, put their plans on hold, because they believe new opportunities will present themselves in The Gambia. People can have renewed hope in their country, which motivates them to stay and work in the country, however this hope will probably not remain if they do not experience visible positive changes in the country within a certain time period. Hope is situated and embedded in or inspired by social imaginaries and realities (Kleist and Thorsen 2016). This phenomenon is explained by Lamin Darboe, executive director of the National Youth Council, as follows:

‘One main opportunity that the new government presents that can help irregular migration is hope. People have hope in the future. They believe the government can deliver something. It is making people that have gone outside to say I want to go home now. Especially if those that have migrated due to hopelessness due to critical situations. (Even though,) The economic situation at the moment is almost the same. But it is too early to judge the government on economic growth. But of course the hopefulness will also contribute because our perception about the economy also contributes and influences especially speculations. (...) We are hoping that hope will be translated into action.’ (Lamin Darboe, 22-05-2017)

Lamin Darboe explains in the last part that even if there is limited actual change in economic opportunities, if you can succeed in making people believe there is, this will also contribute to their hope in a better future and it will consequently influence their decision to stay.

4.3. ‘Voluntary’ returnees, why they return and how they get renewed migrant aspirations

Since the political transition many youth, who were on the backway journey to Europe, have been returning to The Gambia. Author and teacher Michael Hamadi Secka explained that in contrast to the former government, the new government is more willing to take in returnees, as he said:

‘The American government asked Jammeh to sign so that 2000 people could be deported, which Jammeh refused but the present government has signed that. Very soon about 2000 people are to be deported from America which they don’t like. Even those in Libya they came because of frustration, they had no other alternative.’
(Michael Hamadi Secka, 15-06-2017)

When he talks about ‘those in Libya’, it applies to migrants that were on their way to Europe. The EU and the IOM made agreements with the new Gambian government to facilitate voluntary deportees to be returned to The Gambia. Bulli Dibba, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Interior, talked about 800 people who are voluntarily returning from Libya. He explained that the European Trust Fund made 3.9 million euro’s available for the sustainable re-integration of these returnees, which will start with making assessments on health and job skills. Dibba believes that these voluntary deportees are migrants who travelled for economic reasons. He thinks they are now voluntary returning for political reasons, as they want to be part of the new processes accompanying the transition of government. Michele Bombassei, IOM regional migrant assistance specialist, stated in a press release:

'The improved political situation and stability in The Gambia is one of the factors that's helping migrants to take this decision (to return from Libya).' (Michelle Bombassei, in: Hunt 2017)

It is, however, questionable if these returnees are deported entirely voluntarily. The IOM visits Libyan prisons that have locked up irregular migrants from The Gambia and the IOM gives these people the choice between staying in the prison, where they believe they will die, or to return to The Gambia, as my translator translated for the down-hearted Abdoul C. (FR):

'every day you expect to die, because you don't have enough food to eat, you don't have enough water to drink, you are tortured every day, so you expect death every day, so if you see anyone who is supporting you to get you out of there to go home, everybody is open for that, (...) He was never expecting to live and see his family again, so seeing IOM was a great pleasure for him.' (Abdoul C., 07-06-2017)

Even though the migrants know that they could face stigma and blame from their communities for coming back empty-handed, while their families have invested everything in them, they chose to live and are 'voluntarily' deported back to The Gambia (Brachet 2015). This could be what Hamadi Secka meant by saying that the migrants are returning out of frustration, because they had no other alternative. It could also refer to returning migrants who did not have money to continue their journeys and who were not able to get a job on the way. As explained above, some returnees that actually return voluntarily seem to use the transition of government as an excuse to come back and not to appear as a quitter, which keeps the image intact that the new government has a big influence on people's hope in the country. Additionally, in April 2018 I spoke on the phone with S-Bah, my translator and colleague at YepAfrica, who was talking about returnees that were tricked by the IOM on the streets in Libya, who told them if they would voluntarily return with the IOM to The Gambia, they would receive a thousand euro's, which they never received.

When I spoke in The Gambia to Caroline Crawford from the IOM, she explained that their organization's mandate is assisting voluntary returnees with their reintegration. Especially, after the transition of government many migrants voluntarily return. Their office in The Gambia does not have the capacity to gather all the specific data on voluntary returnees, however from experience she could tell that they are almost always men, most of the time from rural areas, up-country. After they arrive at the airport in The Gambia, the IOM immediately interviews all of them. She estimated that 80% to 90% are men between 20-27, although some of the voluntary returnees are very young boys. The other day she even encountered a boy of thirteen years old. According to her, most of the time these children are sent on the backway by their parents. She explained that when irregular migrants reach Europe and decide to voluntarily return to The Gambia, the IOM will give them a grant ranging between 500-3000 euro's. Most irregular migrants that voluntarily return did not reach Europe, but they return from Libya or Niger. From this group, mostly the vulnerable minorities, like women and children, will get a grant, which will range from 500 to 1500 euro's. The grants are never paid in cash and can only be used for trainings, medical issues or for setting up a business. Most of the time they choose to set up a business and they buy some cattle or a taxi. As most voluntary returnees do not know anything about having a business, only a small percentage of the businesses still exist after one year. She explained that the majority of the voluntary returnees will embark the journey again after they have returned.

It seems as if the IOM is indirectly rewarding irregular migration with their grants. Even by using the word grant, which is synonym for the word award, suggests that the IOM has developed

incentive schemes for irregular migration, the further the migrant irregularly travels before returning, the higher the grant he or she receives. The voluntary returnees buy cattle or a taxi with their grants, to probably subsequently sell these items to pay for their second or third backway journey. To stimulate durable investments of the grants, some terms and conditions could be attached to their use. Moreover, for the grants to be effectively used the returnees need help with aligning business plans to the grants. However, at the end of 2017 the fund of 3.9 million has been made available by the EU Trust Fund and Crawford believes this fund will help the IOM to better integrate voluntary deportees back into society.

'The degree of reintegration support will go a long way in determining whether the returnees will stay here or plan to return,' (Lamin Darboe, in: Hunt 2017)

according to Darboe. This fund will also help in facilitating a platform for returnees to share their horrifying experiences on the backway with their communities. However, this method has not proven to work, as some people might experience the warnings as encouragement, because they think the returnees and the EU are trying to keep them away from the wealth that they want to keep for themselves (as explained in the second chapter).

Crawford believes that currently less voluntary deportees would try the backway again, because of the horrors in Libya, although this is not a permanent trend, as a way through Algeria now opens, according to her. Lamin Sainey, district board member KEYDA, also believes that momentarily less Gambians are taking the backway, as he said:

'Less Gambians are going, but they are also very much observant. They can easily access information, how Libya is right now. They normally sit and wait until the journey is very smooth, so they can have a clean passage and then they start embark on the journey. They also realize now that the journey is very difficult to reach your destination. Because others that are on their way will retreat back. It does not mean that they now stopped going. They will retreat back and wait for signals of their friends that are on the way. As soon as they get the signal they will start to embark on the journey.(...) Because there has been a lot of arrest and torturing and killing in Libya. That is why they limit their speed right now.' (Lamin Sainey, 18-05-2017)

Along with giving voluntary deportees a platform to talk about horrifying experiences on the backway, Lamin Sainey believes that documentaries on the backway could help to deter people from embarking on the journey. Lamin Ceesay, my colleague from YepAfrica, agreed with this and added:

'sensitization or education where people see the real picture of the scenario. That will have a great impact in giving them the real picture of what is on the ground. This part can only be played by our state tv stations, because they can show out the videos that people can watch and see the real experience.' (Lamin Ceesay, 18-05-2017)

4.4. Discrepancy between EU funded project and structure of Gambian society

Next to the 3.9 million, the European Trust Fund made eleven million euro available for a project to create a better economy in The Gambia in order for more youths to be employed. Even though the project is mainly focusing on economics, it is called the Youth Empowerment Project (YEP). The objective is to reduce irregular migration. The EU believes the causes of people migrating irregularly lie in economic factors linked with violence and human right abuses. Economic underdevelopment and political instability are therefore seen generally as the main deterrent, or 'root causes', for

irregular migration flows (International Cooperation and Development 2018). With the new democratic government the EU believes the environment is ready to pursue economic growth. Raimund Moser, the program manager of the project, explained about the project:

'Our mandate is to connect small and medium sized enterprises to markets, to value chains. (...) if you want to export or you want to engage in trade, you also need to comply to whatever market requirements there is, whether that is related to food safety and is related to standards and so on. We help them (Gambian enterprises) to comply with that. We help them to become more productive, more competitive on the international market and hence also so they become able to employ more people. What is the link between this and the youth empowerment project, you might ask. In The Gambia we have been asked to come here to address the root causes of irregular migration, so essentially those drivers that lead to Gambian Youth to take the backway and the economic reasons are very important ones.(...) we have been asked to come here to the country to create jobs by taking a market led approach. (...)Jobs that are interesting for youths, jobs that should be able to change their opinion about taking the backway. (...) focus on those economic opportunities that are interesting for youth to engage and at the same time also a demand within the market. (...) hence trying to address the root causes of irregular migration.' (Raimund Moser, 16-06-2017)

Moser suggests that migrants are solely motivated by income maximization to take the backway, as they supposedly compare relative costs and benefits of staying at home with moving (Castles 2010, 10). This is based on the assumption that people will react in similar, automatic and predictable ways to external stimuli, or 'push' and 'pull' factors. It is understandable why the EU would think that creating more jobs in The Gambia would result in stopping young people from taking the backway, as many youths who I interviewed still answered positive on that, even after discussing all the social and cultural pressures involved in their decision to take the backway. A good example is the impatient Mohammed (FR) whom I asked if jobs were the solution to stop youth from taking the backway and he replied:

'Yes, but for me, my mind is not here, it is up like Europe. If I don't go to Europe, it will give me maybe mental problem.' (Mohammed, 01-05-2017)

On the one hand, I understand that policymakers need frames and narratives to do their work, which makes a general theory applied on a global scale, easier executable. On the other hand, overarching laws, labels and quantifications can obscure the complexity of a specific society and result in a one-dimensional approach in countering irregular migration. This rationality disregards the 'subjective'(social norms, meanings, emotions) and the complex relationships and processes in a particular context involved with irregular migration (Cramer, 2006). Migrant aspirations are embedded in social and cultural processes in The Gambia and in the historically embedded geographical imaginary about Europe (Gaibazzi 2013), which are not dealt with in this project. As the project is called Youth Empowerment Project I asked Moser further about how empowerment is incorporated in the project and he replied:

'For us predominantly the focus is on economic dimension (...) empower youth in a sense that you give them a stage and take them seriously, you are opening up

opportunities, also not just economically speaking but also in the social context, (...) that they are also around the table for guiding the direction of the future of The Gambia and there it is not just economics.(...) I'm working as a trade economist and normally what we push is trying to have more exports and more of the country engaging in the world. Here we have an issue of everything is imported (...)it is important to produce more locally and create a sense of pride with The Gambians, that they are proud of their own production. Because currently there is a feeling that everything that comes from abroad is better and that I think also adds to the backway syndrome.(...) With entrepreneurship we want to instil a sense of pride, a sense of excellence and also just being proud of what is here and your own.' (Raimund Moser, 16-06-2017)

As Moser explained, it is very important to think about how to install youth with a sense of pride in The Gambia. Moser is approaching this challenge from an economic perspective. The new government could assist his effort to get Gambians to produce more locally with subsidizing Gambian products. Installing this sense of pride could, besides trying to use economic methods, also be reached by making changes in for instance the educational system. Now the educational system is largely oriented towards the West, as also explained in chapter 3 (Schapendonk 2011). To get Europe of its pedestal, in the minds of Gambians, history could be explained in schools from a more African point of view.

After talking about the theory behind the YEP project I asked about how the project will work in practice and Moser replied:

'we work with the private sector in different forms, so you have those companies that we are supporting to start up. (...) the private sector here is very small so you have to have a lot of entrepreneurs often also operating in public sector, (...) then you have the companies that are already in business, small/medium size enterprises, which we are supporting again to be more productive, where we hope through the assistance they will be able to create more jobs (...) we are also working with the larger entities, which can also create employment by (...) helping them to become more successful, you will also have a trickledown effect on their respective value chain and their supply chain.(..) the larger ones you help them to conquer new markets, to internationalize, to attract more investment and to attract clients abroad and so on. (...) the start ups it is different, you give them basic support like financing to create their own enterprise, sometimes basic accounting, book keeping and basic entrepreneurship support, which is development services.' (Raimund Moser, 16-06-2017)

These larger enterprises that they aim to help could possibly compete the small and middle size companies out of the market, which will only cause more economic inequality in the country. It will not help the poorest people in the country, who are most inclined to take the backway. The International Monetary Fund analysed in 2015 that to get sustainable economic growth in a developing country it is important that the richest 20 percent does not grow in wealth, because the GDP will then decline over the medium-term, which suggest that benefits do not trickledown. When the poorest 20 percent increases in wealth, consequently the GDP will grow faster. Therefore, according to the report, the focus of the project should only be on the poor and middle class through interrelated social, political and economic channels (Dabla-Norris et al., 2015).

The social foundation, for this EU funded project to work, seems to be lacking, as there are deep inequalities of gender, income and power in The Gambia (Raworth 2012). Moser explained that

they are mainly assisting the private sector, however, to increase the income share for the poor and the middle class, the public sector should also be a focus area. For instance, the project could invest in making schools and healthcare more accessible. Moreover, to help more poor youth to get a job, the school curriculum could be adjusted more to the demand of the market. To stimulate the economy a lot of work needs to be done on the non-existent infrastructure in the country. Next to that it is important to get a better wealth distribution in the country by establishing appropriate minimum wages. When I asked Moser about this, he replied:

'we don't have a mandate for establishing a minimum wage.(...) There is a conversation that is going on at the level of the government looking at this and setting a minimum wage, but this is a process and until this is formalized we cannot make any reference to that thing, but (...) I had conversations with people who had good jobs and earned like 8000 dalasi or 9000 dalasi, which is in a context here is considered as an okay salary and they still took the backway, so you know there are always these out layers with 2000 dalasi income you cannot create a very good job that can keep people here.' (Raimund Moser, 16-06-2017)

Interestingly, Moser contradicts himself by saying that good jobs will not necessarily keep youth from taking the backway, because reducing the backway through job-creation is the whole objective of the project. Nevertheless, more people with low-wage jobs take the backway than people with high-wage jobs. The biggest economic motivation behind youth taking the backway is the inequality in wages, as previous chapters have shown that relative deprivation in society triggers youth to embark on the journey. Establishing a minimum-wage together with better employment protection could contribute to reducing these inequalities. Another thing to assist the poor and middle class youth would be designing labour market policies that support job search and skill matching. This is something the YEP project is focussing on a lot, as Lamin Darboe, executive director of the National Youth Council, who is also involved with the start-up of the project explained:

'The youth empowerment project is going to take a market led approach. (...) we have conducted three main consultations. We have made consultations with employers and employees, training institutions and employee institutions of the private sector. Also engage young people and youth entrepreneurs and service providers among tourism value chain, agribusiness value chain and ICT value chain. So they communicate and are able to identify what are the gaps. If I employ Senegalese in the ICT why are you employing them?. Does it means they have skills Gambian are not getting? What is their skill set, so they tell us that. GTMI (Gambia Telecommunications and Multimedia Institute) are training people to meet their skill set. If there is a global need for someone to appoint, they can easily go to GTMI to come and do that job. It is going to take that so direct employment is created, one. Two, YEP project is also trying to ensure that information about opportunities is available in the country are shared with young people.' (Lamin Darboe, 22-05-2017)

When I spoke to S-Bah, my translator and colleague at YepAfrica, on the phone in April 2018, the implementation of this project had begun, though he was worried that the project did not reach the most poor and low-educated youth that are most likely to take the backway. He told me the project was funding mini-grants for start-up entrepreneurs, but first you have to hand in a business plan,

however these vulnerable youth and returnees are either not aware of these mini-grants or they do not have the knowledge to access it. S-Bah believes the YEP project should involve organizations like YepAfrica with the implementation of the project, because they know who to target and how to reach these youths. The main critique on the design of the project is actually that the one-size-fits-all project will not tackle inequality. According to the International Monetary Fund these international policies should be depended on 'underlying drivers and country-specific policy and institutional settings' (Dabla-Norris et al., 2015, p. 4) . Chandler (2006) questions if implemented Western models for economic growth will function everywhere in the Global South. To create an environment where economic growth is possible and where people's life aspirations are met, it is better to first address societal problems instead of providing for a lack of jobs. Otherwise the country stays interdependent on European support.

When I talked to Moser about family pressure behind youth taking the backway, he replied that parents will become aware that investing in a business for their son or daughter is more profitable than investing in the backway for them, as he said:

'say the trip costs so and so much and with this money rather than sending your sons and daughters, you could start this business or you can create this and this, which generates this income. And you can do those comparisons between those returns and investments, then that is equalling to educate their parents.' (Raimund Moser, 16-06-2017)

However, I am afraid that these parents will not reason in the same way, as they will not make such calculations. Many parents care more about receiving a big amount of money at once from their children in Europe than the small amounts of money generated from a start-up company (see chapter 2). People in general are more irrational, they will rather follow community gossips and their own feelings.

Another argument why creating a better job environment would not necessarily deter youth from taking the backway is that development will likely increase migration rather than reduce it (Smouter 2014). When other drivers behind youth taking the backway are not dealt with, economic development alone will just assist young people with gathering the resources needed for migration faster (Castles, 2010: 298). According to migration transition theories, development will lead to increased migration on short and medium term. Income growth, improved education and access to information together with improved communication and transport links increase capabilities to migrate (Castles, De Haas, Miller 2014). When I asked Moser what he thought of the theory that economic development would only assist youth to acquire the money they need to take the backway faster, he replied that they, as International Trade Centre only encourage migration, however not irregular migration and he explained:

'I think the more you educate people and give them the skills and the means and the income, then I think the chances are higher that they will travel in a regular way.' (Raimund Moser, 16-06-2017)

I do not believe, however, that the jobs they indirectly create in for instance food-production will give these youth the skills or requirements to acquire a travel visa to Europe, as the policy is very strict and many youth have a negative view on the visa (explained in previous chapter). By the time I posed Moser this question I was aware of this, as I had already interviewed many failed returnees. I

explained to him that some of my interviewees experienced being rejected for a visa or heard negative stories on the visa policy before they took the backway. These youth experience the visa as being unattainable for youth like them. They feel as if they have no control over the institution that provides visa's, while they experience the backway as something they can control more. Moser did not know about the perception youth have on the visa policy, as he replied:

'Maybe, did you come across this sort of sentiments across the youths?'. (Raimund Moser, 16-06-2017)

I also explained that many of the interviewees I spoke experience the visa application as very expensive. For instance, the seemingly depressed Salifo (FR) said:

'The money you spent on visa can take four or five people for this journey (backway) to go.' (Salifo, 18-06-2017)

When I explained to Moser that some youth believe that the visa application is much more expensive than taking the backway, he replied:

'You are talking about maybe two or three hundred dollars (for the visa application), whereas the backway is in the marges of 2000 dollars or depending on the route.' (Raimund Moser, 16-06-2017)

However, Gambian youth do not experience it like that, as they do not embark on the journey with 2000 dollars, but more something in the range of hundred or two hundred dollars. When they are on the journey they start asking family and friends to send them more money or they have small jobs on the route to pay for the journey, therefore they perceive the big amount they need, at once, for a visa application as more than the money they pay in terms on the backway. Besides this they see the money they invested in the visa application as a waste of money as it is not refunded after rejection.

One of the main sectors the YEP project is investing in is agriculture. This sector is not only sponsored by this project, as Taibou Sonko, deputy director Ministry Youth and Sport, explained it is planned that 25 million will be invested in creating jobs in agriculture for youth. However according to Kea (2013) this sector is not very popular to work in at the moment, as it is associated with the 'traditional' way of life based on low earnings for hard labour. This trend of less people taking on an agrarian lifestyle towards more income diversification has begun in Sub-Saharan countries from the 1990's with the introduction of market liberalization (Bryceson 2002, p. 725). The wise-looking Omar (FAM) works as a farmer, however he feels that people look down on that, as he said:

'When people see me working, they say he is useless, you must have a white collar job for respect. If they see you in the street, They think your education is not fruitful.' (Omar, 19-04-2017)

Now more Gambians than ever aspire getting education and a 'white collar' job (working in an office) and moving out of farming. These changes in people's mind-set must be situated in a neoliberal economy and globalized gender and generational expectations, in which male Gambians struggle paying the costs of education, healthcare, food etc. The ambitious Causu D. (FR) explained it is the male responsibility to work for the family, as women do not have the physics, but also not the mental capability to do that, as he said:

'If you tell a woman to do that (work long hours) and share it with the family, it is a hard for a woman to do that.' (Causu D., 18-06-2017)

In the neoliberal economy, farming produces little financial outcomes, while display of consumption and redistribution of wealth are very important (Kea 2013).

According to Ibrahima Jammeh, deputy director at a secondary school, the EU should invest in less physically demanding jobs, as he explained:

'when the mind is there and the brain is okay, healthy, once you are educated, when you are 80/70 and you have to make cement it is not possible.' (Ibrahima Jammeh, 31-05-2017)

Moreover, the agrarian ethos of moral rigour and physical discipline is exportable to other contexts, like migratory occupations, according to Gaibazzi (2013). Interestingly S-Bah, my colleague from YepAfrica, confirmed that most people who take the backway are originally from the agrarian regions: North Bank, Upper River Region, Central River Region and Lower River Region. These youth sell their cattle or land to embark on the journey. The more policy makers try to stop illegal migration by focussing on getting the youth more involved in sedentary farming, the more they will develop an agrarian ethos that does not presuppose a settled life.

Author and teacher Michael Hamadi explained how the wish for upward-social mobility plays a central role in why some youth do not do certain jobs, by saying:

'Here the concept is, you go to school to get a white collar job, to work in an office. Without that you are a failure. (...) therefore they say well the only way to get rich is to travel to Europe.' (Michael Hamadi Secka, 15-06-2017)

Lamin Darboe explained the interest in farming declined, because of globalization, as he said:

'Where wealth is created, traditionally in our community in our value system has been on hard work and integrating. With globalization that is eroded, our value system went to affluence and wealth. (...) show the excess is considered successful. (...) People are leaving the rural area for the urban because that is where the wealth is.' (Lamin Darboe, 22-05-2017)

Moser is aware that farming is not very popular with youth, however he explained that the YEP project has found a solution for this, as he said:

'if you go for instance in the groundnut sector, which is an important sector in The Gambia, it is more like old men who are doing the work, if you are looking at horticulture it is often more the women who do the production, so it is indeed a big challenge and an important one to find those jobs in the agriculture sector that appeal to youths, in particular young men who are most prone to take the backway. There again if you look at the whole chain of production, you have for instance in processing, you have interesting opportunities, so that tends to be more interesting for youths.(...) Now if you look at the production itself, one way of making it interesting for youths is like farming not just work in the land, but as a business.'

Farming as a business, so integrated farming systems. (...) This is happening in the North bank in Farefenji. It is such a centre that they train the youths, mainly men to work in such integrated farming systems where you have poultry and agriculture, you have different horticulture but you also have some of the meringha, leaves and some of the tea production. You have food production for poultry and so on, so on. That becomes more interesting because it also answers the question of seasonality, so you have year round income opportunities.' (Raimund Moser, 16-06-2017)

The YEP project does not strive actively to include women in their integrated farming centres. Moser explains that traditionally women and men have separate tasks within agricultural sectors. Notions of power and status, retrieved through irregular migration, are strongly associated with masculinity in The Gambia. Young men feel constant pressure to provide for their families and they see the backway as the solution for this problem. It is, therefore, very important to find a way to release some of this pressure. Empowering women by including them in the YEP project and all its trainings could reduce masculine expectations and obligations. Besides, it would be important that the project invests in family planning services, which will empower women to manage the size of their own families, which will slow population growth, so there would be less mouths to feed. It also gives women more time to focus on themselves and their work (Raworth 2012). Establishing a minimum wage together with a maximum of working hours per day could also encourage more women to do similar jobs like men. All these measurements help in deconstructing the idea that it is a masculine responsibility to provide for the family.

Most of the Formerly Aspiring Migrants I interviewed were working in agriculture and they were complaining that they only have work for three months, during the rainy season, while the rest of the year is filled with 'boredom and poverty', which aspires youths according to them to take the backway. Therefore it is very good that the YEP project focuses on innovation of farming techniques that will create year round income opportunities.

As the EU funded project is called Youth Empowerment Project The Gambia, they are also (minimally) investing in empowerment training. The EU shows its power by teaching The Gambians how to make enterprises successful and facilitating the money to invest in their enterprises. Gambians look up to Europeans and are grateful for the opportunities they are given, while at the same time the EU trade agreements with The Gambia keep them stuck at a certain poverty level and dependent on the EU (Chandler 2006). The project is largely executed out of the self-interest of the EU, namely keeping The Gambians from being unhappy with the situation in their country and keeping them from coming to Europe. On the other hand, as Lamin Sainey, district board member of KEYDA, explained Gambian organizations also have partial control in how the EU money is spend. He said:

'The fund is available. The process has started because the minister of youth and sport has send a request for all youth organizations to send in their proposals which will strategize how they will implement this project.' (Lamin Sainey, 18-05-2017)

Moser further explained about the inclusion of youth organizations:

'one of the principals of this project is that we would built on what is already there, so we built on existing initiatives that have been done in the country (...) the assumption

is that most of the work that we do, we channel through existing institutions and system programmes.’ (Raimund Moser, 16-06-2017)

However, according to my colleague at YepAfrica, S-Bah, whom I spoke on the phone in April 2018 this is not happening much. It is very important that Gambian youth are also in charge with directing the project, because one of the reasons why the Aspiring Migrants and the Failed Returnees want(ed) to take the backway, is because they expect that this journey will lead them to be able to create employment in their own country, not only for themselves, but for other Gambian youths. Bottom-up initiatives have, therefore, the potential to ensure an inclusive and sustainable economic development without being too dependent on the EU. Mariama Bah, mother of an irregular migrant, explained why only by clearly observing and understanding Gambian youths it will become clear what their needs and wants are, as my translator translated:

‘She said it is like for her kids when they were young she buy a lot of play materials for them, so she will know what actually the guy love most, because that is how she know what focus area, she will focus them on when they are matured, like if the son is playing with football more then she will expect this guy will become a player, so for if example if the government can develop in various areas then actually that will help but without which people will move based on their aims. If you want to become a footballer and you don’t see football developing then you expect football to develop in Europe, then you will move. If you want to become a mechanic and you don’t see that opportunities here, you don’t see it improving here and you expect Europe to be the place where it grows then you will move.’ (Mariama Bah, 07-06-2017)

Nobody can better assess what kind of jobs these young Gambians need and want than Gambian youths themselves.

Similarly to what Mariama Bah thinks, Kali Lucidibe, father of three irregular migrants, believes it is not just the lack of employment that has driven his sons to take the backway, but also the lack of diversity in jobs. He explained that they left, because they want to:

‘attend to their dreams, the aims that they have, not only curiosity, but the aim that they have as youth, young people. They want to do this and this and they think okay Europe, with the support in Europe they can do it. That is why most of them are leaving’. (Kali Lucidibe, 12-05-2017)

Lucidibe believes the reason they left lies in a conjunction between the idealized images of Europe and the natural high aims and expectations that youth generally have. I believe that if these youths are stimulated more to be independent and in charge of things, they would get a reality check, which would adjust their expectations and would make them only dream bigger when the ability is within reach. The unrealistic dreams youths get from media images make them not want to do certain jobs, as teacher Michael Hamedi Secka explained:

‘Some of them (youths) feel too good to become a carpenter. Some of them feel too good to become a tailor. Some of them feel too good to become a farmer.’ (Michael Hamadi Secka, 15-06-2017)

However, when these youths reach Europe, only similar jobs are available for them, like cleaning and selling products on the street. However, these youths then can keep it a secret from the community and they will not lose face for having such jobs. According to Hamadi Secka Gambians' perceptions towards these kind of jobs should change, as he explained as follows:

'So first of all try to explore the potentials of the youth. That is why this man Thomas Mann said, education is a supreme human gift to an unique individual that is heading towards what he has in him to become. Rather than sending our children to school and say well you have to become a scientist, you have to become a doctor, let the child chose his own area of studies.(...) empower the youth and in empowering them you make them independent to cultivate, an independent mind, rather than colonizing the mind of the youth.' (Michael Hamadi Secka, 15-06-2017)

Hamadi Secka thinks it is important to make youths aware of all the possibilities The Gambia has to offer them. He made this clear through a story about a friend who wasted his time by migrating to America, as he said:

'After mending the shoes (in The Gambia) he was able to get some money and he became a barber and from there he opened a tailoring shop. From there he had other factories, so he regretted spending 23 years abroad, where he was as poor as a church mouse. He only spend five years in his country and became rich. So that sense of that mentality should be demystified. And then power has to be imbued into the youths to have trust in their environment.' (Michael Hamadi Secka, 15-06-2017)

This 'American dream' mentality that everyone can get rich, youths currently more apply to the backway, as explained in chapter 2. Hamadi Secka wants youths to believe they can make it in The Gambia, no matter what background they have. If this faith is to be created, even though it is not reachable for many in The Gambia, it will give youth a perspective on another life in their own country. Hamadi Secka argues that there should be changes in both culture and education to change people's notions on the good life, as that also influences their personal life/migrant aspirations.

4.5. Migrant aspirations for differentiated reasons

Another reason why the YEP project, based on economic determinism and the assumption that people will react in similar, automatic and predictable ways to external stimuli, will not change the migrant aspirations of every youth, is because everyone's migrant aspirations are different and are dependent on personal complex relationships and processes in particular contexts. Between the Failed Returnees I interviewed, I was able to detect four different types of youths, which would have probably been more if I had interviewed more people. The first type consisted of youths who are unrealistically obsessed with going to Europe and are largely driven to go because their friends already took the backway. They are very likely to try the backway again. The impatient Mohammed (FR) falls under this category as he believes he will get 'mental problems' if he does not go to Europe and about his friends he said:

'from fifteen years above there is no one, only me in this area, so all them are gone, some live in Germany, Sweden, Italy, Spain, so in any compound I don't see my friends, everyone is gone, so if I go to any compound I feel sad, because I am living

alone, no friends with me, because children I don't chat with children, my brain is more high than them.' (Mohammed, 01-05-2017)

The second type consists of youths with big dreams which in their opinion they cannot easily fulfil in The Gambia and they think Europe is the answer to all their problems. The ambitious and naïve Sainey (FR) perfectly fits under this category as he said:

'If I can go to Europe, I can have an extended family, bigger (...) second, third wife, because we accept that.' (Sainey, 05-04-2017)

The third type consists of youths that appeared very traumatized to me and who mainly embarked on the journey to find a job in Europe to support their families back home. Interviewee Moustafa (FR) was one of these men. His answers were very short, because it seemed that he was trying to repress his emotions. Especially when I asked him if the backway had changed him, he seemed to be struggling with his emotions. His parents supported him when he took the backway and he feels responsible to take care of them financially. Even though he said that he does not feel ashamed towards his parents after failing the journey, it seemed to me that he was. When answering the question what he likes and dislikes about Europe, his response was: *'Me I like, when I go, I work'*. If he does not get a job in The Gambia, he told me that he would try the backway again. The fourth type consists of failed returnees that seemed to have embarked on the backway because they feel/felt aimless and useless and have the desire to contribute financially to their parents and the community. Both the insecure, noble-minded Mousa (FR) and the motivated, responsible looking Lamin (FR) belong to this type, as they aspire to contribute to the development of The Gambia. Mousa said:

'I want to suffer because of the country.' (Mousa, 05-05-2017)

Similarly, Lamin explained that if he would have succeeded in making money in Europe, he would built a factory in The Gambia, so that other Gambians could have profited as well.

The first type of Failed Returnees have an intrinsic desire to migrate to Europe, because they are hungry for the experience and adventure that awaits them, while the Failed Returnees of the third type do not necessarily want to migrate, however they feel obligated towards their parents to migrate in search for better job opportunities to support their families back home. Therefore their desire to migrate is instrumental. This also applies to the fourth type of Failed Returnees. They feel a lack of respect at home and think that if they migrate they would be considered more important to their families and the community. The second type of Failed Returnees have both instrumental- and intrinsic desires to migrate, as they have big dreams in life for themselves and they do not think that they can realize them in The Gambia. For the different types of youths, different methods are needed to reduce their migrant aspirations for the backway.

Why and when youth get migrant aspirations also depends on the context they are in. Just like rural youths are inclined to take the backway, because they only have something to do during the rainy season, also newly graduated youths are vulnerable to take the backway. For down-hearted Ibrahima (FR) the period after graduation is the time he became aware that he desired to take the backway. Similarly, the flighty Buba (FAM) started to think about taking the backway after he graduated secondary school, because he could not find a job. It is therefore crucial that the period between graduation of primary school and the start of secondary school together with the period of

graduating secondary school and starting university is very short. Besides there should be programs that assist both graduates from secondary school and graduates from university to find jobs.

4.6. Reducing youth taking the backway through empowerment

According to Raworth (2012), empowering people means battling deprivations (extreme inequalities within and between countries) in order for all people to live ‘with the rights and resources needed to provide a social foundation for leading lives of dignity, opportunity, and fulfillment’ (p. 7). Empowered people are able to influence political and economic processes that shape their life, they must feel like they have full control over the decisions they make in their lives. Especially tackling the inequalities (in for example employment and earnings, and in social participation) between men and women is crucial to get inclusive sustainable development. These inequalities are embedded in politics, markets and institutions and they are partially reinforced by economic policies and development strategies like the YEP project, because the project is respecting local gender roles and it is also mainly targeting male youth, as they are most vulnerable to try irregular migration. However migrant aspirations are affected by implicit and explicit expectations from the family and the kinship networks and the kinship networks are in turn influenced by gender-specific societal customs and norms (Whitehead et al. 2007, p. 18). Men are expected to show that they would even sacrifice themselves (by taking the backway) looking for wealth for their families. If women also get jobs that can provide for the family, these gender-specific customs and norms might change, leading to less expectations from the families and kinship networks, which would result in less youth feeling obligated to take the backway.

There is a lot of relative deprivation in Gambian society, people feel jealous, because their neighbors have more money than they have. If you have money it is common to show this off in the community. This also applies to the numerous ceremonies and events, like naming ceremonies and kora concerts (which I both attended) that often take place. These events revolve around spending money and the more money you spend, the more respect you are given by the community. When the ceremonies are hosted by friends or family, you are expected to attend and spend money on the entertainers at the event. When the time is there (if you get a baby or get married) you are also expected to host the costly ceremonies. This exemplifies the many traditions and expectations the communities and families have of youths. I also found it striking that my friend Beres did not visit his grandparents in a long time, even though he wanted to, because he felt obligated to take along a gift for them, like a bag of rice and he did not have money. These expectations give many youths a lack of self-worth. The sensible-looking Omar (**FAM**) believes that the lack of self-worth is the reason why so many people depend on each other. Even though he likes it that Gambians share everything, he would like it also if Gambians were more self-empowered. This lack of self-worth among youths might be the result from the many elderly looking down on them, as Moser explained:

‘I found myself often in forums, where society is very fragmented here, there are forums where the youths are not taken seriously, (elders view them as if) they sit there and drink ataja, they do their football and they are just being lazy and they live under their parents rules, which is not fair. That is not my impression that I have here, of course there are youths who are sitting but the aspirations are there you know. (...) I mean I am impressed, whether it is social protection, whether it is sports, whether it is agriculture, whether it is entrepreneurship for any of these areas I can point you several youth associations who are excellent, who are very driven and striving for

excellence, well organized, very serious and they want to achieve something, (...)you need to break down those stereotypes, you need to break down those social borders.'
(Raimund Moser, 16-06-2017)

The youths look up to these elderly people and when the elders perceive them in a certain way, it happens that the youths take on some of the patterns/stereotypes they get ascribed. From Moser's statement it becomes clear to me that not only the youths should get sensitization trainings, but also the elderly people.

When I asked Moser if there were socio-cultural challenges or differences with European norms and values that slowed down their plans for the YEP project, he replied:

'Yeah sometimes the tribal aspects but I think it is no longer a big issue (...) if there is a job they will give it to the people they know, to family and not necessarily to those who have the best qualifications. (...) then there is also what I see as the biggest cause for tension is sometimes the age gap, the generation differences, (...) for instance in the agriculture groups, when it comes to reporting back, you always want the youth to report back, (...) the elders would not want the youths to say what is actually happening, if they have been working in the groundnut sector they have been doing it in a certain way and they don't want any interference, they don't want anybody to actually tell them you could do it differently, (...) how can you find ways for the youths to work together with the elders in a respectful way, because the elders are not just there, they have a lot of experience, they have a lot of things that they can teach the youths so they need to be part of it, but at the same time you also want to give youths the opportunity to take over responsibilities within a sector, within different areas, these are the things I would say that are important challenges. Probably more than along the tribal aspects.' (Raimund Moser, 16-06-2017)

If parents were stimulated to give their children more independence on a younger age, it would give youths more positive freedom and a feeling of agency. Then they might be more inclined to try and change their situation instead of migrating somewhere else. Their situation could change from involuntary immobility to acquiescent immobility, therefore their subjective well-being will probably increase, which could make them more inclined to invest in local futures (De Haas 2014).

According to Lamin Sainey, district board member of KEYDA, sensitizing parents is very important also in order for them to react in the proper way when their son has already embarked on the journey, as he stated:

'If your son embark on this journey and is in Niger and says I am here and if you don't send money I will go this and that and that. You go to lend money and send part of your properties. You still try for him to go. What if you say just come back, we don't have money to send for you. I've seen people who went up to Niger and their parents could not send them money. They have to retreat back, they come back to The Gambia. They are with us and their parents are having money but they don't want their kids to go. To me some of those families that send them money their young ones to continue the journey, are still in support of the journey. Maybe one can consider if the individual is arrested by bandits and they demand money for his release. Yes for that one you can send money. But sending money for them to continue the journey,

definitely the families are in support of what the kids are doing.' (Lamin Sainey, 18-05-2017)

Parents need to become aware that it is more profitable if they invest in an entrepreneurship training for their children than in the backway journey for their children. I realized the necessity to make parents aware that stimulating their children to do such trainings is fruitful when I saw the change in the traumatized Dodou (FR) after participating in an empowerment/entrepreneurship training of YepAfrica. When I interviewed him beforehand about his backway experience, he was quiet and he did not want to show his emotions. His mother seemed to be everything for him. He barely had hope in a brighter future. During the training I saw him opening up and smiling. He was getting excited and motivated for the future. To ensure that starting capitals for businesses have any use, the YEP project, the government or the IOM, should only give them out after empowering these youth and their parents. This is also something that Omar (FAM) expressed in order for less youths to take the backway. Gradually, the empowerment of elders and youths will also somewhat deconstruct the all encompassing power of God. Youths will become aware that they determine their own faith.

Another factor that makes youths vulnerable to take the backway is if they drop out of school at a young age. According to teacher Michael Hamadi Secka it is mostly the school dropouts that take the backway. These children drop out of school even though 'the government provides for school fees and they also provide for some books, so the parents only buy uniform, the shoe maybe, the bags those kind of things,' as stated by Ibrahima Jammeh, deputy director at a secondary school (the reasons why children drop out is explained in chapter two). Ibrahima Jammeh promotes that the new government should not tolerate child labour, as it is fixed by law that children have to go to school, the police should also enforce this and report parents whose children are working in the streets or on the land.

Lastly, what embeds the lack of self-worth in children from a young age is the image that is reinforced through media, but also development projects, of Africans stuck in poverty, not being smart enough to develop their own continent. Lamin Jammeh, assistant data recorder at the irregular migration unit, argued that besides poverty and family pressure, also the fact that the majority of development projects is done by Europeans, is what drives youth to take the backway, as it makes youth believe that Europeans are more intelligent and better at developing Africa than themselves and therefore to become like Europeans they should go to Europe. Therefore, it is crucial that development projects are built on bottom-up initiatives. It is also important to change the image that exists of Africa, not only for the self-esteem of Africans, but also for Europeans, as Lamin Darboe explained:

'The Africa shown on television is not, the Africa that exists. In Africa you have people that have two hands, two legs, brains to think, to communicate in English, they eat like us and do other things. So when those young people (from Europe) become policy makers to will inform policies (in Africa), that do not only restrain Africans coming (to Europe with a visa) and plunder their resources, but see them as human beings and working with them as partners, so two benefits will be there.' (Lamin Darboe, 22-05-2017)

4.7. Concluding Remarks

In this chapter I tried to answer the question how policy influences Gambian youth to either take the backway or to stay in The Gambia and if local empowerment could deter youth from embarking on the journey.

The former president Jammeh tried to restrict and scare youth from taking the backway. In the perception of my interviewees his policy did not work, as he barely offered youth other opportunities in the country itself. To the contrary, the new government tries to persuade youth to stay in the country by trying to create jobs and working together with the EU to limit irregular migration. Gambians seem to carefully gain trust again in the government institution, however they feel it is too early to say if they can actually change something. It is questionable, however, that youths are taking the backway solely for political and economic reasons. Migrant aspirations can appear to be ambiguous as many youths give mixed signals. Still many people seem to take the backway and the voluntary returnees could just use the argument of hope in the new government, as an excuse to leave the hardship of the journey behind them. Other youths wrongfully believe that the new government can increase the amount of travel visa's that are given out. Gambians are also not used to having a democracy, some think it means they can act as they like, including taking the backway or they might feel that the process of decision making in such a big coalition goes too slow. Hopefully, the new government can make all the changes the youth expect quickly, because if nothing will change within a certain time period, they will probably try the backway (again), as hope is inspired by social imaginaries and realities (Kleist and Thorsen 2016). However more probably it will take a long time, because they have inherited very little from the former government. According to teacher Hamadi Secka and KEYDA board member Lamin Sainey the government should include youth talent-development in the school curriculums and focus on getting youth to be self-reliant in order for them to want to stay in The Gambia. Government officials and the IOM claim youths are returning from Libya voluntarily as they want to be part of new government processes, however many did not feel they had the choice to continue their journey. Until now the re-integration of returnees has not gone smoothly, many low-educated returnees fail to obtain funds, as they barely get help with making solid business plans, others use their grants from the IOM to try the backway again, others seem to wait for new routes to Europe to become safe to embark on, besides the one through Libya.

There is a mismatch between how migrant aspirations are shaped through Gambian society and how the EU funded YEP project interprets them. The approach based on economic determinism will not necessarily reduce the amount of youth embarking on the journey, because overarching laws, labels and quantifications can obscure the complexity of a specific society and result in a one-dimensional approach in countering irregular migration. This rationality disregards the 'subjective' (social norms, meanings, emotions) and the complex relationships and processes in a particular context involved with irregular migration. Migrant aspirations are embedded in social and cultural processes in The Gambia and in the historically embedded geographical imaginary about Europe, which are not dealt with in this project. The YEP project is aiming to get more sustainable economic development in the country, however the inclusiveness of the project could be questioned, as it seems as if it is not reaching the poorest and low-educated youth, that are most vulnerable to take the backway. The EU should also make it an objective to actively include women in their project, which will smoothen inequalities between men and women. To accomplish this they should establish a minimum wage together with a maximum of working hours per day, in order for more women to be able to do similar jobs like men. Consequently, women can also contribute to their families, which will reduce masculine expectations and obligations. It will change notions of power and status, that

are currently strongly associated with masculinity and are now retrieved through irregular migration.

To increase feelings of self-worth among more youth, real and perceived inequalities in Gambian society have to be battled, as it equalizes feelings of power to make one's own decisions. Besides, if parents are stimulated to release some control over their children, they can be more independent at a younger age, what would give them a greater feeling of agency. Accordingly, the youths might be more inclined to try and change their own situation instead of evading what needs to be done. Lastly, to empower Gambian youth, the media and bottom-up development initiatives should assist in deconstructing the image of Africans being stuck in poverty and not having the intelligence to make a change.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This study, aimed at deconstructing aspirations of male Gambian youths taking the backway, gave a deeper understanding of the macro and micro socio-cultural factors that influence migration desires in The Gambia during the political transition. In this study I tried to capture the culture of migration in The Gambia in a specific time period. To find out how migrant aspirations are shaped I explained the phenomenon in three empirical chapters, each of which answered one of the sub-questions. First, in chapter 2, the socio-cultural influences on migrant aspirations at a micro-level were analysed. In chapter 3, the imaginaries of Europe versus images of The Gambia were investigated, which concerns macro-level influences of the emigration environment on aspirations. In chapter 4 the (potential) influence of (new) policies on migrant aspirations were discussed and possible initiatives of a solution to limit irregular migrating of Gambian youth were given.

Throughout the chapters the stories of my interviewees were outlined and through these stories it was highlighted how different aspects influence migrant aspirations of youths. The interviewees consisted of youths that intend to-, have intended to- or have tried to irregularly migrate to Europe. The interviewees, however, were not considered to be disconnected individuals, as I have 'embedded' them in a wider social environment and a context of political transition. This focus on 'embedded individuals' is reflected in my data collection as I also included the perspectives of government officials, school children, teachers, social workers and parents of children that have migrated irregularly. The opinions of the non-migrants were important to include, as they showed the general attitude towards irregular migration in The Gambia (King 2015) and possible influences of the social network of the aspiring migrant on their decision to take the backway. The culture of migration was explored through the concepts of desires and aspirations. This exposed the social complexity in a person's decision making. These underutilised theoretical perspectives have explained an alternative way of framing migration, which critically engages with its own place in politics and mobility (Carling and Collins 2018). It revealed how Gambians perceive irregular migration in terms of success and failure, which is important to answer the main question: **How does the connotation of 'sitting' during the recent political transition in The Gambia influence young men living in the West Coast Region in their aspiration and decision to migrate irregularly to Europe?**

'Sitting' means for many Gambian youths a feeling of being stuck in a role they do not want to be in. Economic crises after the 1980s caused unemployment among youths, which made it more difficult for them to provide for their families, which is an attribute of adulthood in The Gambia (Ceesay 2016). It made youth feel useless and aimless. However, there are also other attributes of adulthoods, such as 'getting married', 'travelling' and 'overcoming hardship' (Gaibazzi 2010). These accomplishments could similarly give youth societal success. On the other hand getting married requires being able to take good care of your wife, otherwise she would probably file for a divorce, which would cause down-ward social mobility. Many youths believe taking the dangerous backway is an effective way to show family, friends and the community that they have the aim and discipline of grown men, as they would even sacrifice themselves in search of a better life for other Gambians.

Migrant aspirations are also inspired by jealousy. Youths get jealous of other youths, because the ones that migrate are respected more in society. This happens within families as well, even if the son who stays in The Gambia is contributing more financially, because the families project their hope of another life on the son in or going to Europe. At the same time the family often believes that if

they respect the son who took the backway more, he will focus on remitting money back and going into legality as the reputation of the whole family depends on him. Youths experience that money made in Europe is more valued by the society than money made in The Gambia. They believe that there must be easily accessible money in Europe also derives from the older generations, that became wealthy from migrating in a different time. This image is reinforced by European tourists who spend a lot of money on their holidays in The Gambia. It shows how decision-making is embedded in social-cultural dynamics. It refutes the idea of the migrant as rational decision maker, as it shows how decisions for irregular migration are not only situated in economic imperatives, but also in imaginative geographies, social relations and obligations, emotional valences and power relations.

For many Gambian youths the backway gives an opportunity to experience progress (Jonsson 2012), as they do not feel they can get these opportunities in The Gambia. They feel stuck in their individual development and see migration as the way forward. It is perceived as a way to skip the phase of effort and learning but still get upward social-mobility (Ludl 2008). Others think their education process will start by experiencing the backway. Many interviewed youth feel that their friends, that successfully completed the backway, got a head-start on developing themselves. They are afraid that when their friends should return to The Gambia while they are still stuck there, the friends would not want to be friends with them anymore, as they will be in a higher class. This exemplifies the lack of personal worth of many youths and how the desire to migrate depends on the mobility of other people from the community. The youths express future possibilities that are desired, as well as the social structures they emerge in. The decision to migrate thus negotiated between the future, past and present.

In The Gambia these 'sitting' youths live in spaces of waithood, reinventing their identities through popular Western mass culture. They develop idealized imaginaries of Europe influenced by media and reinforced by their own social networks. Gambians who reached Europe remit biased positive information about the place, as they probably want to hold on to their acquired higher social position that they got by travelling there. The imaginaries have become embedded in Gambian society and influence migrant aspirations. Consequently the imaginaries can cause someone to take the backway misinformed and ill-prepared. Youths ascribe valued practices in Gambian society, like 'sharing', to Europe, as they also experienced the kindness of European social workers in The Gambia. Consequently their life aspirations shape their migrant aspirations. At the same time their life aspirations are strongly influenced by the personal disposition, family expectations and Gambian values and norms. However, youth's life aspirations are in turn also influenced by societal images of Europe versus images of The Gambia. The positive images of Europe are enforced by the strict visa policy. Obtaining a visa is in general experienced as impossible for Gambian youth. Therefore, the visa has become a luxury for the happy few, which appeals to the imagination of Europe.

Failed returnees could develop more positive images of The Gambia, posing their country against other countries on the backway where they experienced horrific things, although they could also think that the whole of Africa is a bad place, as Libya is perceived as a 'wicked' place. Failed returnees have experienced the backway, which either increases their migrant aspirations, as they get obsessed with reaching the goal of Europe, or they believe it is due to fate that they did not make it and their migrant aspirations decrease and they become more ambitious to succeed in life in The Gambia. Both types possibly feel ashamed for not realizing their families' investment in their backway journeys. Faith in a pre-determined plan of God can influence risk taking. Parents let their children embark on dangerous journeys, because they believe God already has a plan for them and

they should not interfere with it. Some youths also explained that God has blessed Europe more than Africa. This feeling derives from the fact that there is more attention for Western cultural and economic achievements in Gambian society. This results in youths thinking The Gambia is stuck in poverty and the only way for them to get wealthy is taking the backway. Moreover, this mentality neglects the difficulties involved with saving money in The Gambia. Families function as social security system in The Gambia, therefore it is common that the incomes of male youth are shared among everyone. The salary quickly dissolves, even if it is a high amount, because then everyone will 'coincidentally' need a little more. Some youths try to respectfully escape these obligations by migrating. The experienced chances for success in The Gambia also decrease by embedded corruption. Youths do not feel that they have equal chances, because even with a degree, you will more easily get a good job if you have a good social network.

Hope can shape migrant aspirations. Hope for a better future in Europe can increase migrant aspirations and hope in the new democratic government can give youth expectations for a better future in The Gambia, which can result in a decrease of migrant aspirations. Gambians seem to carefully gain trust again in the government institution, although migrant aspirations can come back if nothing will change within a short time period, as hope is inspired by social imaginaries and realities (Kleist and Thorsen 2016). In the perception of many Gambians, change will probably not happen fast enough, as they are used to the quick changes an autocratic regime can make and with a big coalition of parties this will probably take longer. The many youths who have been coming back from Libya since the transition could use the argument of hope in the new government as an excuse to leave the hardship of the journey behind them and come home without appearing weak. Next to that they feel that the IOM only gave them the choice of staying in Libyan prisons or returning to The Gambia and not an option to continue their journey. Other youths wrongfully believe that the new government can increase the amount of travel visa's that are given out and therefore they are just waiting for that to happen.

With job creation the EU and the new government expect to give Gambian youth another option to evade the feeling of 'sitting', rather than taking the backway. However, for many returnees the re-integration in The Gambian job market has not gone smoothly, many low-educated returnees fail to obtain funds, as they barely get help with making solid business plans. Others use their grants from the IOM to try the backway again, or seem to wait until new routes to Europe, next to the one through Libya, are safe to embark on. The new projects are mainly focusing on creating jobs in agriculture. However, the agrarian ethos teaches commitment, moral rigour and the ability to endure long working hours. In the eyes of many Gambian families a son who has these qualities is considered a good investment for taking the backway. Therefore, creating less physically heavy jobs would be better and these jobs can also still be practiced at an older age, which allows them to not need financial support from their children when they get older. Moreover, jobs in sectors such as agriculture are not very popular, as youths dream big in the globalized world. Children drop out of school to find poorly paid jobs so they can start contributing to their parents as soon as possible, as it is believed this will get you more blessings in life and leads to getting respect from the community (Jones and Chant 2009; Ceesay, 2016, p.199). Their lack of education only gives them access to poorly paid jobs and they are already entangled in social pressure at a young age, which makes them vulnerable to escape this by taking the backway, as they believe this is the only way to resume their education and continue their self-development. Therefore it would be good to invest in improving the school curriculum, giving them the opportunities to become self-reliant faster and putting more emphasis on talent-development at a young age.

In this thesis I analysed the interconnectedness of multiple factors shaping migrant aspirations. The study showed that Gambian youth have layered motivations, which gave an in-depth picture of the view on life Gambian youths have that is very dependent on norms and values of Gambian society. Migrant aspirations are contradicting and ever changing. Some youths that aspire to take the backway leave without informing their families, as they know that the family would be against it at first instance, but they would be happy once they succeeded. Contradictory, the families that are against the backway are still disappointed when their children fail to complete it.

5.1. Reflection and recommendations for future research and policy:

This study is sited in The Gambian West-Coast, however for further research it would be interesting to pose this study against perceptions of Gambian youth living in Europe on their expectations of Europe before they migrated and how these changed now they live in Europe. It would also have been a great addition to this study to ask them how they believe they present themselves towards their families and communities in The Gambia and if they are aware of their influence on migrant aspirations of youth living in The Gambia. Next to that, it would be interesting to incorporate interviews from youths that live more up-country and see how their life world is different from the life world of the youths I interviewed and how this influences migrant aspirations.

I am still in contact with my translator S-Bah and my friend Beres, therefore I was able to ask them and incorporate their view on the political transition and the implementation of the YEP project almost a year after my stay in The Gambia. It would, however, also be interesting if I could redo all the interviews I had with youths to see how their perceptions have changed on the hope in the political transition and the projects accompanying it and if their migrant aspirations have changed the past year. To get a more complete image on the migration aspirations of youth that desire to go to Europe, it would be interesting to conduct similar research in other West-African countries. Moreover, for further research on the role imaginaries play in migration to Europe these migrant aspirations could be posed against those of West-African youth desiring to go to wealthy African countries, such as South-Africa or Morocco.

This study showed that migrant aspirations are embedded in socio-cultural processes and the historically embedded geographical imaginary about Europe. People are not rational beings making cost benefit analyses, they will rather follow community gossips and their own feelings. Therefore policies based on economic deterministic solutions for limiting youth taking the backway are probably not very effective. The overarching laws, labels and quantifications obscure the complexity of a specific society and result in a one-dimensional approach in countering irregular migration. It would be interesting for the academic community as well as for the improvement of policy making to conduct more research on to what extent women empowerment can influence male migrant aspirations. Moreover, policies aimed at reducing irregular migration should be more inclusive, as it seems that they are otherwise not reaching the poorest and lowest-educated youth, who is most vulnerable to take the backway. To reduce the backway future policies should include encouraging women more as an objective, as this could smoothen inequalities between men and women, in order to reduce masculine expectations and obligations that lead to men taking the backway. This study also showed people have layered motivations for taking the backway, therefore only including economically based policies will not change migrant aspirations much. Policy makers are now mostly focussed on local bounded realities, even though this research shows that especially imaginative

factors inspire migrant aspirations and make irregular migration a normative phenomenon. Imaginaries on Europe could be deconstructed if more Gambians would be allowed to go to Europe and return. All the interviewed youths expressed having the intention to return to The Gambia, however, because it is such a struggle to reach Europe, they are triggered to stay indefinitely.

This research has not given an unchanging set of root-causes for irregular migration everywhere or an all-encompassing theory on irregular migration. Contrary to that, it showed that migrant aspirations constantly change along with the changing political and cultural environments, social relationships, and so on. The complexity of migrant aspirations and their embeddedness in society must urge us to study them thoroughly and innovatively, to constantly revise migration theory and, most importantly, to synchronise policy making with these new insights.

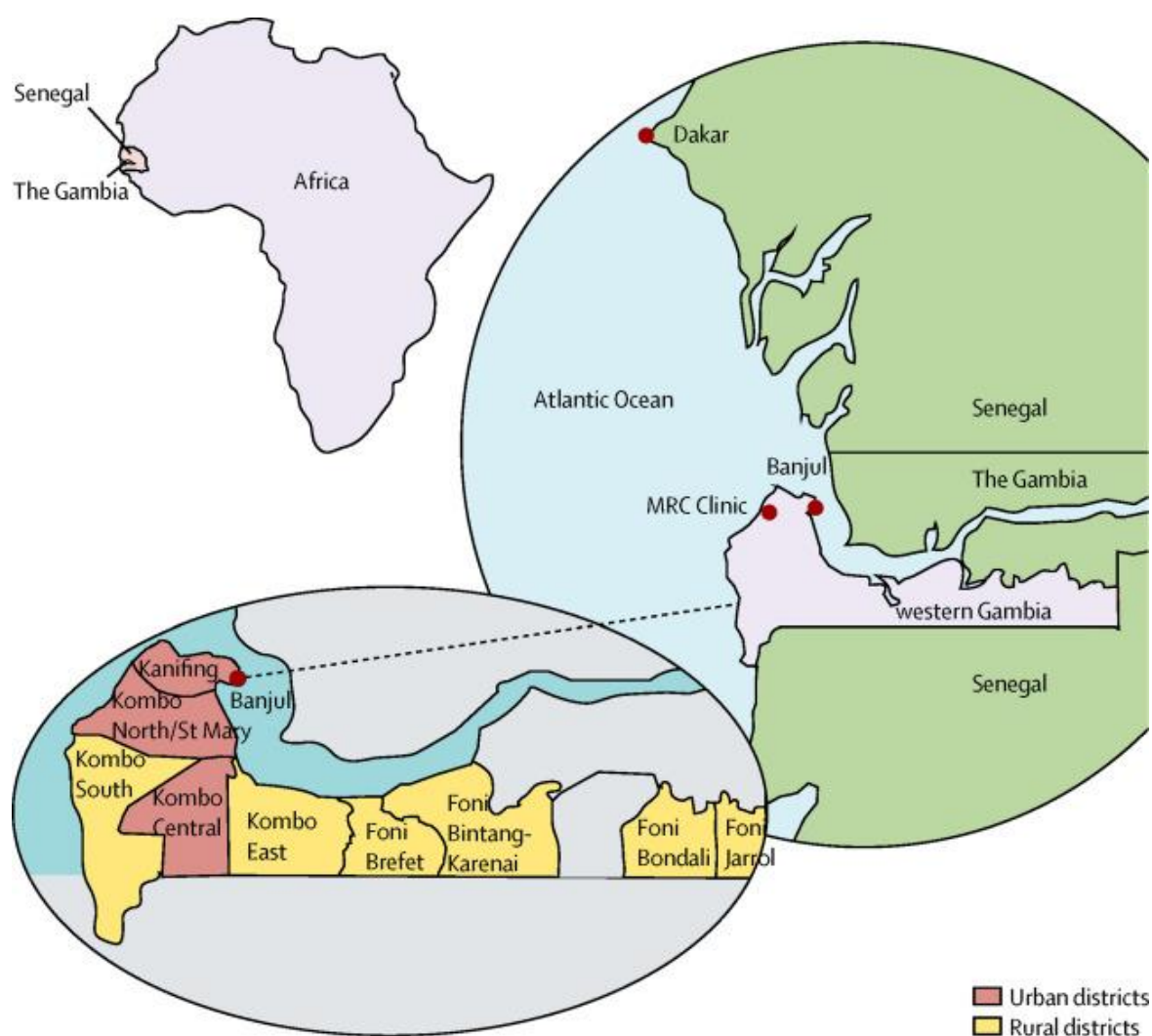


Figure 1: Location of The Gambia in Africa with the West Coast Region highlighted. Retrieved from:
[https://www.thelancet.com/journals/langlo/article/PIIS2214-109X\(16\)30130-9/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/langlo/article/PIIS2214-109X(16)30130-9/fulltext)

Appendix 1: Overview respondents

Name	Sex	Age	Education level	District within West Coast Region	Location interview	Date of interview	Type of migrant
Mohammed	M	27	Grade 4	Kombo North	At his house	01-05-2017	Failed Returnee category 1
Abdoul K.	M	29	Grade 12	Kombo North	At his house	27-04-2017	Failed Returnee category 1
Moustafa	M	20	Grade 10	Kombo North	At YepAfrica	27-04-2017	Failed Returnee category 3
Ibrahima	M	23	Grade 12 (Arabic school)	Kombo North	At the lodge where I stayed	24-06-2017	Failed Returnee category 3
Abdoul C.	M	23	Never went to school	Kombo East	In a public place in Kuloro	07-06-2017	Failed Returnee category 3
Salifo	M	29	Grade 8	Kombo East	At the house of my translator S-Bah	18-06-2017	Failed Returnee category 3
Dodou	M	18	Grade 5	Kombo North	At YepAfrica	05-05-2017	Failed Returnee category 3
Causu D.	M	28	Grade 9	Kombo East	At the house of my translator S-Bah	18-06-2017	Failed Returnee category 2
Sainey	M	20	Grade 11	Kombo East	At YepAfrica	05-04-2017	Failed Returnee category 2
Mousa	M	22	Grade 9	Kombo North	At YepAfrica	05-05-2017	Failed Returnee category 4
Lamin	M	23	Grade 9	Kombo East	At YepAfrica	05-05-2017	Failed Returnee category 4
Causu	M	35	Primary School	Kombo North	At YepAfrica	19-04-2017	Aspiring Migrant
Saidu	M	31	Primary School	Kombo North	At YepAfrica	19-04-2017	Aspiring Migrant
Alhasan	M	29	Grade 11	Kombo North	At YepAfrica	19-04-2017	Aspiring Migrant
Saidu B.	M	36	Never went to school	Kombo North	At YepAfrica	13-04-2017	Aspiring Migrant

Ismael	M	23	Grade 12	Kombo North	At YepAfrica	19-04-2017	Formerly Aspiring Migrant
Modou	M	31	Grade 10	Kombo East	At YepAfrica	19-04-2017	Formerly Aspiring Migrant
Omar	M	27	BA in development studies	Kombo North	At YepAfrica	19-04-2017	Formerly Aspiring Migrant
Abdoul	M	22	Grade 10 (Arabic school)	Kombo East	At YepAfrica	19-04-2017	Formerly Aspiring Migrant
Buba	M	22	Grade 12	Kombo East	At YepAfrica	26-04-2017	Formerly Aspiring Migrant
Mariama Bah	F	>30	Grade 5	Kombo East	In her garden	07-06-2017	Mother of irregular migrant
Kali Lucidibe	M	>40	Never went to school	Kombo North	At his house	12-05-2017	Father of 3 irregular migrants
Mama Gite	F	>35	Arabic school when she was young	Kombo East	At a primary school	12-05-2017	Mother of irregular migrant
Sona Mani	F	>35	Arabic school when she was young	Kombo East	At a primary school	12-05-2017	Mother of irregular migrant
Hawasi	F	>30	Never went to school	Kombo East	At a primary school	12-05-2017	Mother of irregular migrant
Ibrahim	M	18-27	Grade 9	Kombo East	At a primary school	12-05-2017	Brother of irregular migrant
Four boys and two girls	M & F	13-15	Still in primary school	Kombo East	At a primary school	07-06-2017	Brothers and sisters of irregular migrants
Aleou, Modou and Mariama	M & F	15-20	Still in secondary school	Kombo North	At a secondary school	31-05-2017	Brothers and sisters of irregular migrants
Lamin Jammeh	M	20-35	/	Kombo East	At his office	18-06-2017	Data record assistant irregular migration unit
Bulli Dibba	M	>40	/	The Gambia	At his office	19-06-2017	Permanent Secretary Ministry of Interior
Caroline Crawford	F	25-35	/	The UK	At her office	20-05-2017	Works at IOM The Gambia

Michael Hamadi Secka	M	>40	/	The Gambia	At YepAfrica	15-06-2017	Author of 'Horrors of the backway' and teacher at Gambia college and University of The Gambia
Taibou Sonko	M	>40	/	The Gambia	At his office	14-06-2017	Deputy director Ministry Youth and Sports
Ibrahima Jammeh	M	>40	/	The Gambia	At a secondary school in Kombo North	31-05-2017	Deputy director of a secondary school
Lamin Darboe	M	30-40	/	The Gambia	At his office	22-05-2017	Executive director National Youth Council
Lamin Sainey	M	25-35	/	The Gambia	At YepAfrica	18-05-2017	Board member of KEYDA
Lamin Ceesay	M	25-26	/	The Gambia	At YepAfrica	18-05-2017	Program Officer at YepAfrica
Raimund Moser	M	30-45	/	Switzerland	At a bar	16-06-2017	works for the International Trade Centre and is the program manager of the EU's <i>Youth Empowerment Project</i> in The Gambia

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